

Skills  
Development  
Scotland

# Positive Steps to Your Future



# Positive Steps to Your Future: introduction

**Skills Development Scotland offers a full range of career management, employability and information services to enable you to make well-informed and realistic decisions about your next steps. All services are free, impartial and tailored to suit the needs of individuals.**

## How Skills Development Scotland can help you

We can support you to:

- develop effective Career Management Skills (CMS)
- make well informed, realistic career decisions
- widen your career horizons and challenge your thinking about career options
- locate and apply for alternative opportunities
- review progress in achieving your career aims.

We have resources which can help you:

- research careers, job vacancies, learning and training opportunities
- explore appropriate funding
- investigate trends and changes in the labour market.

We can offer practical assistance in:

- making decisions and how to implement change
- identifying your current skills, expertise and strengths
- applying for new work, training or learning opportunities
- developing a CV
- completing application forms
- preparing for interviews.

## My World of Work:

- My World of Work can help you explore your options and make the best decisions for your future. It is packed with useful features and advice to help you for whatever stage you are at.
- Register and log on at **[myworldofwork.co.uk](http://myworldofwork.co.uk)**
- For help using My World of Work, please call us on 0800 917 8000. Opening hours for calls are 9am-5pm Monday to Friday.

## How else can we help you?

- Telephone: if you would like to speak to someone about how Skills Development Scotland can support your next steps, call us on 0800 917 8000.
- Face to face: we can offer you a meeting with an Adviser at your local Skills Development Scotland careers centre. Call 0800 917 8000 to arrange an appointment or use the centre search tool on My World of Work to locate your nearest centre.

## Redundancy support from PACE

If you are facing redundancy or have recently been made redundant, further support is available through the Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE).

Skills Development Scotland leads the delivery of PACE on behalf of the Scottish Government in partnership with a number of organisations. All the support in this book is part of the PACE offer. In addition, PACE offers free, impartial advice and support to help you:

- understand the redundancy process, as well as your rights and entitlements
- check what benefits you may be entitled to
- with practical advice on getting a new job
- identify learning and training opportunities
- start up a business.

Call 0800 917 8000 or visit **[redundancyscotland.co.uk](http://redundancyscotland.co.uk)** for information and advice on the full range of PACE services and how to access them.

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# SECTION 1

## **Facing change, embracing change**

**Develop and make use of your Career Management Skills to allow you to take control of your future. This section also looks at dealing with your feelings as a first step to moving on and progressing.**

# Supporting Positive Change through Career Management Skills

This book is a resource to help if you are facing redundancy or have recently been made redundant. However, it can be helpful for anyone facing change. Well-developed Career Management Skills empower people at any stage in life to take control of their career.

Career Management Skills are skills for life which can be acquired at a variety of points and in a range of contexts as illustrated below. They help you make effective decisions and realise your potential at any of these points:

Lifelong career management skills	Before starting work
	Moving beyond education toward work
	While in work
	When not working
	Preparing to leave or reduce work

## Career Management Skills (CMS)

Career Management Skills strengthen your understanding of self, strengths, horizons and networks to help you take control of your future:





- **Self:** understanding your personality, interests and values is key to making the right career decisions
- **Strengths:** knowing how to describe and use your talents, skills and personal qualities can lead to successful transitions
- **Horizons:** exploring the world of work, training and learning helps your understanding of all the options open to you
- **Networks:** identifying who can assist you, and how, in your career journey will make progression easier

Skills Development Scotland can help you develop the capabilities that lead to lifelong successful career planning. You can refer to this book at any time for ideas and information.

## Dealing with changes in your career

**A key aspect of today's job market is that people may not stay in the same job for life. You may experience, or be forced to consider, a change of job or career on more than one occasion throughout your working life. Why is this the case?**

Redundancy can affect all sectors and levels of the labour market so a change of job or career may be a necessity rather than a choice.

Where people do stay with the same employer there can be opportunities to progress within the workplace. Also, advances in technology or changes to working practices may mean a job role can alter or even disappear leading to a need for retraining.

People may experience time away from the labour market for a variety of reasons, for example to care for a relative or due to illness. A return to work may involve a change of job or employer.

Many people choose to continue working after the age at which they can retire. Sometimes people cannot afford to retire when they would like to. Often, however, it

is a chance to refocus your career, for example by working part-time or taking on less responsibilities.

### Redundancy

You may be facing redundancy at present. You will no doubt be going through a wide range of emotions and may not be sure how to deal with them.

You've probably asked yourself a number of questions:

- what happens now?
- what else can I do?
- how am I going to find a new job?

This book aims to support you through this major change in your life by helping you to answer these questions. It will also help you to consider the ways in which you can use your feelings positively to move on to new opportunities.

### Case Study

Roy lives in the Scottish Borders and lost his job through redundancy after 35 years in the textile industry.

He was put in touch with a Careers Adviser via PACE (Partnership Action for Continuing Employment) and, after some discussion, he decided to access training locally and successfully completed a SVQ 2 in Floristry which included practical floristry, business studies and botany. He is currently studying for a SVQ Level 3 through a college in Edinburgh.

Roy felt that self-employment would be the best option for him. After seeking advice from Business Gateway, he has opened his own shop in the Borders. Through the learning he has undertaken he is now able to share his knowledge with customers with confidence and professionalism.

Roy is hoping to progress to a Higher National Certificate in Floristry on a day release basis, to further develop his skills.

### Development within the workplace

The job market is changing all the time so it's important that you review your skills and qualifications at regular intervals. This goes hand-in-hand with continuously developing your skills. The fact that you want to continue in your position does not mean that you cannot develop within it. However, you have a shared responsibility with your employer to identify areas for development.

You might also feel stale in your current situation and that it might be time for a change – but you're not sure what to do about this.

- Could you move into a different job within your organisation?
- Should you think about a new career or employer?
- How can you re-train?

You can address these questions through a step by step process. This process involves identifying how you feel at present, what you have to offer and how to address any gaps in your skills or experience.

### Case Study

When Susan started work as a waitress in a large hotel, she had no previous knowledge of the hospitality industry. With experience, she took on an informal role which involved training new employees at the hotel. Susan recognised that she had skills and strengths in this area and decided to put herself through a recognised qualification with the help of funding she received from an Individual Training Account.

Her employers recognised her commitment and determination and helped her to fund the remainder of her studies. Susan is now Deputy Manager with responsibility for the development and implementation of the company's training plan. The training plan has helped improve staff morale, lowered staff turnover and raised levels of service and customer satisfaction.

### Returning to work after a break

If you have been out of the labour market for any length of time, a return to work after a break can be daunting. You may be concerned that your skills and knowledge are out of date or even that the ways to find work have changed. Getting the right support can help.

This book can provide a confidence boost by helping you understand what you have to offer and that many of the skills and strengths gained during time away from the workplace are transferable and relevant. It will also give you tips and techniques on how to tackle the job search process.



### Case Study

After serving his time as an apprentice, Atif worked as an electrician. He enjoyed the work and maintained regular contracts of employment until health issues meant that he could no longer cope with the physical aspects of the work.

His diagnosis with MS (Multiple Sclerosis) coincided with the birth of his first child and he spent time at home as the main carer. After his second child was born he was keen to return to the labour market and sought advice from his Careers Adviser about the type of work he could do that he would enjoy. He knew that he liked talking to people and cared deeply about the rights of disabled people.

Atif knew that, with the right adaptations to the equipment, his IT skills would be valuable in the workplace. During some voluntary work experience for a charitable organisation he applied for an Access to Work Grant and has since secured a job as a receptionist for the charity. In the future, he would like to do the Certificate in Medical Terminology so he can try for a career in medical administration.

### Retirement

Retirement is a major life event. You may have to make decisions about work and careers, leisure, health, family and finance. You will have to adapt and adjust to changes in lifestyle, social contacts and relationships. As you approach retirement you will need a great deal of information and advice to help plan for the future.

This book can help you work through some of these issues, taking you through a process which helps you to identify what is important to you and where work fits into your life.

### Case Study

Alice had worked in retail since leaving school and decided to take early retirement. She had no formal qualifications but a wealth of experience in a variety of areas. This included working as a supervisor, a trainer and a first aider. In her spare time, she had experience of looking after an elderly relative and helping at a day care centre for people with physical disabilities. Alice was also a keen amateur baker.

Her main interest was to secure work in the care sector; in particular she was interested in working with young people with additional support needs. Alice and her Careers Adviser worked together to create a CV highlighting her relevant skills and achievements. She then contacted a local organisation to gain further experience on a voluntary basis.

Alice also decided to apply to a local college and was offered a place on the NC Child, Health and Social Care course. However, before starting the course she was offered part-time employment. Since then, she has begun training on the job which means she can earn while she learns. She has been able to supplement this income by baking cake pops which she supplies to cafes in her local area.

# The impact of change – dealing with feelings

**We move on now to look at your own situation and the current change you are facing.**

During any process of change you will experience a number of different and often conflicting feelings. Many of these feelings are associated with a sense of loss for what you have been familiar with and a resistance to the changing situation around you.

These changes can be welcomed or imposed –

but the change that occurs can still lead to feelings of loss, fear and worry about the future.

Such feelings could alter your health, your judgement and your energy levels. It is important to deal with any such feelings appropriately and positively.

This part of the guide helps you to address your feelings and identify ways in which you can use these to positive effect. This can be a helpful process and the next task is a good starting point.



## Task

**How do you feel? Discuss how you feel with someone you trust and then write answers to the following questions:**

**What are your feelings about the work you have done for your present employer?**

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**What do you feel about the situation you are in?**

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**How do you feel about the financial responsibilities that you have at present?**

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**How do you feel about the effect that redundancy/retirement/job change may have on you, your family and friends?**

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**How do you feel about the idea of looking for a new job?**

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**Are you aware of other feelings that have not already been mentioned?**

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**What is positive about the feelings you have mentioned above?**

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**What are the negative aspects of the feelings you have outlined above?**

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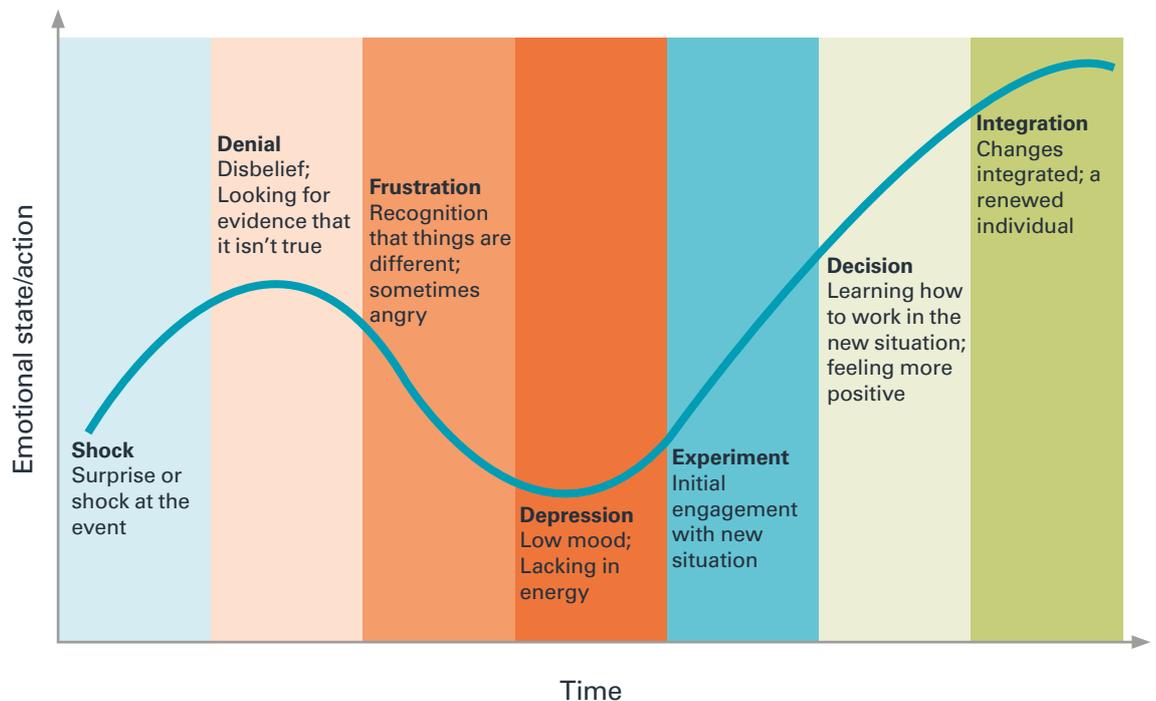
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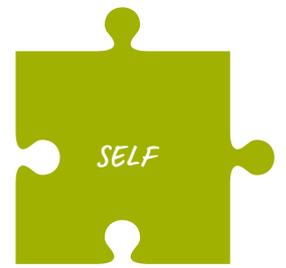
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# Recognising your feelings

Whatever the reason for the change taking place in your life, you are bound to experience a range of different emotions. Such feelings can affect your morale and confidence, acting as a barrier to progress and your future success.

The Change Curve below can help you understand the process of change and how it can affect you emotionally. It shows how we feel when we are experiencing change and how we react to what is happening. You may recognise some of these feelings from the previous task.





## Redirecting your feelings

**In life, there is always a solution to a problem. Not taking control of the situation and doing nothing can make problems worse. The keys to good stress management are building emotional strength, being in control of your situation, having a good social network and adopting a positive outlook.**

It is important to review your feelings, focus on the future and look at ways to use your feelings positively. You will inevitably find some feelings easier to deal with than others.



**Shock:** You may feel unprepared for the change that is happening to you. Being active through exercise can reduce some of the emotional intensity you are feeling, clearing your thoughts and letting you deal with the situation more calmly.



**Denial:** Sometimes it is not easy to picture a future that is different to what you are used to. Changing a difficult situation is not always possible. Try to concentrate on the things you do have control over such as creating an up-to-date CV or LinkedIn profile.



**Frustration:** There's a solution to any problem. The feeling of loss of control is one of the main causes of stress and lack of wellbeing. The act of taking control is empowering, and is a crucial part of finding a solution that is right for you.



**Depression:** You are not alone. A good support network of colleagues, friends and family can help you see things in a different way. Talking things through with a friend can help you find solutions to issues you are facing.



**Experiment:** Take time to explore what is out there. Setting yourself goals and challenges helps to build confidence. Helping others through activities such as volunteering or community work can build your resilience.



**Decision:** You will feel ready to look to the future and assess your options, set goals and put plans into action. Prioritise tasks that will make a real difference to your situation. Leave the least important tasks till last and don't forget to take some time out to do something you enjoy.



**Integration:** The future is looking brighter. Stay motivated by looking for the positives in life and things for which you are grateful. Try writing down three things that went well, or for which you are grateful, at the end of every day.

# Barriers to change

**This is one more thing to consider. When facing change many people can see barriers in their path – barriers that prevent progress.**

Barriers may be practical or emotional. Either way, if not overcome, they can prevent us from fulfilling our full potential.

What are the barriers that you feel prevent you from achieving your goals and making a positive change in your life? Write down your thoughts below.

**Practical barriers – childcare, transport, lack of qualifications, finance etc.**

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**Emotional barriers – lack of self confidence or belief, negative self-image, fear of change, etc.**

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**Now be positive and confront the barriers**

**What strategies can you create to overcome these obstacles? Remember that nearly all problems will have a solution. Jot your ideas down in the space below.**

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## Accepting change

**The process of accepting change begins when you acknowledge and start dealing with your feelings. Acceptance is easier when you realise that there is gain as well as loss in the change you are facing. Accepting change is relatively easy in some situations. In other situations it is harder and takes longer. If you are finding it hard, ask yourself:**

**‘Why do I find it hard to accept the new situation?’**

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**‘What is stopping me from making the most of the rest of my life?’**

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Consider your answers. Try to focus away from the past and begin to think about what your future might look like.

All change involves loss and gain. The familiar may have to be left behind as many new challenges present themselves – and that isn’t always easy to face.

In the next task, you can begin to look at potential benefits which could come out of the change you are facing.

# Change: the benefits



## Task

What benefits or gains can you see coming out of the present change?

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**This is the end of the section 'Facing change, embracing change'. You have had an opportunity to review your feelings and identify the positive aspects of the change you are facing. If you still feel you are uncertain how to deal with your feelings about change you may find it useful to review this section or get in touch to discuss things further.**

## SECTION 2

### **What have I got to offer?**

**Consider your skills, strengths, qualities and achievements and their value within the job market.**

# Moving on – discover your value

**Skills, strengths, knowledge, experience, personal qualities and achievements are the currency of the job market.**

These are part of a 'package' which employers will 'buy'. Because of this, it is important to be able to identify and highlight your skills and achievements correctly if you are to get the job that is right for you.

Most people tend to underestimate their skills, strengths, qualities and achievements. Things we do all the time and without great effort may seem simple to us – in reality they may represent a high level of skill or require a lot of knowledge. This is not the time to be modest!

Most of our skills and abilities are transferable. We take them with us when we move on and we should expect to go on using them in a new context in the future. Not all your skills and qualities will have been used in your most recent job. Don't forget that you also develop skills outside of work e.g. in voluntary work or leisure activities.

What do we mean by 'transferable skills'? Every individual has lots of skills, many of which employers will be looking for in an employee. However, most people can usually only identify a few of these, and are generally unable to describe them to an employer. Employment experts all agree that being able to identify your skills is essential to a successful job search.

Imagine you are in an employer's shoes. During the recruitment process, they are essentially buying a person costing thousands of pounds per year over many years. Naturally they will want to know what this person can do. Knowledge of your own selling points is therefore vital for completing an application form, writing a CV or answering interview questions.

Transferable skills are simply those that can transfer from one job or occupation to another. Many of the skills you use in one career can be successfully transferred to a very different type of job. So, it is essential to think about the ways in which your existing skills might fit into a new role if you are planning:

- a move to a similar job or a career change
- a move to other jobs within your current company
- a return to work after a break
- a new way of working after retirement.

A skill is not just having expertise in the use of a specific piece of equipment. Skills are a combination of different things. These include:

- knowledge – what you know (for example, markets, products, geographical areas)
- attitudes – how you approach things (e.g. enthusiasm, motivation)
- character – your personality/personal qualities (e.g. sense of humour, diplomacy)
- strengths – things you are naturally talented at (e.g. public speaking, numeracy)
- experience – what you have done (e.g. work experience, qualifications, training, voluntary work).

The next task provides a starting point in identifying skills you have. Use it on your own or discuss it with a Careers Adviser who can help you pinpoint what you have to offer a future employer.



# Identifying your skills

**Employers are interested in knowing which skills you can bring to their organisation. Many skills are transferable to new work settings and can be grouped together in different ways.**

Many of the skills you have can be used across a number of different job areas and in new work settings. This 'Skills Check' activity will help you identify the skills you have and highlight those that

you might like to use or develop in the future. It can also help you understand the range of skills you have developed, not just in paid work but in other aspects of your life. This is a positive first step to your future and will help you to avoid taking your skills for granted.

For each item decide how you feel and circle the most appropriate number. Write the total number of 1s, 2s and 3s at the bottom of each column.

## 1. Team work/interpersonal

Remember people's names	1	2	3
Talk to people you don't know	1	2	3
Cope with awkward or difficult people or people who are upset	1	2	3
Keep calm/control your feelings	1	2	3
Accept feedback in a positive way	1	2	3
Compliment/encourage someone	1	2	3
Introduce and welcome new people to each other	1	2	3
Relate to a wide variety of people	1	2	3
<b>Add up your total</b>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

## 2. Information technology

Use a computer keyboard, type	1	2	3
Utilise social networking sites, blogs, e-mail	1	2	3
Use packages such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint	1	2	3
Organise and store information on a computer	1	2	3
Access the internet to research and gather information	1	2	3
Design/edit websites	1	2	3
Play computer games	1	2	3
Use work related software such as CAD, SAGE	1	2	3
<b>Add up your total</b>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

### 3. Problem solving/reasoning

Find solutions to difficulties/problems	1	2	3
Be able to anticipate change	1	2	3
Solve puzzles e.g. Sudoku, crosswords	1	2	3
Assess a situation quickly	1	2	3
Look at new ways of doing things	1	2	3
Apply yourself to completing a task	1	2	3
Judge the relevance/importance of information	1	2	3
Understand complex ideas	1	2	3
<b>Add up your total</b>			

### 4. Written communication

Spell correctly/use a dictionary	1	2	3
Understand the meaning of words	1	2	3
Write clearly and concisely	1	2	3
Edit written materials	1	2	3
Present ideas and information in writing	1	2	3
Sell yourself in a CV or application form	1	2	3
Read quickly/spot mistakes	1	2	3
Write minutes, reports etc	1	2	3
<b>Add up your total</b>			

### 5. Numerical

Use a calculator	1	2	3
Calculate using mental arithmetic	1	2	3
Interpret charts and graphs	1	2	3
Calculate averages/percentages	1	2	3
Deal with statistics	1	2	3
Understand balance sheets	1	2	3
Budget effectively (projects/household)	1	2	3
Work out best value in pricing	1	2	3
<b>Add up your total</b>			

#### Key

- 1 = I'm not good at this/can't do this
- 2 = I can do this
- 3 = I'm confident I can do this well
- If you have mainly 1s then this is a weaker skill area for you.
- If you have mainly 2s then you have an average ability in this skill area.
- If you have mainly 3s then this is a stronger skill area for you.



## 6. Practical/manual

Design or make something	1	2	3
Carry out repairs	1	2	3
Operate equipment/machinery	1	2	3
Work from drawings/plans	1	2	3
Drive a vehicle	1	2	3
Construct/assemble objects e.g. furniture	1	2	3
Paint and decorate	1	2	3
Lay flooring materials	1	2	3
<b>Add up your total</b>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

## 7. Planning and organising

Plan and organise work effectively	1	2	3
Work under pressure or to deadlines	1	2	3
Organise your time well/prioritise tasks	1	2	3
Handle change in your work or life	1	2	3
Lead and co-ordinate projects/tasks	1	2	3
Set yourself achievable goals	1	2	3
Monitor your progress in achieving goals	1	2	3
Make well informed decisions	1	2	3
<b>Add up your total</b>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

## 8. Verbal communication

Make a presentation to a group	1	2	3
Negotiate/bargain to achieve a desirable outcome	1	2	3
Speak clearly/be understood	1	2	3
Give instructions to individuals/groups	1	2	3
Use a telephone	1	2	3
Explain information and ideas	1	2	3
Tell a story	1	2	3
Listen carefully to others	1	2	3
<b>Add up your total</b>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

## 9. Physical

<b>Head for heights</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Strength</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Stamina</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Good co-ordination</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Quick reactions</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Nimble fingers</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Steady hands</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Physically fit</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Add up your total</b>			

## 10. Supervisory

<b>Motivate others</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Organise groups of people</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Support people to develop skills</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Know how to delegate tasks</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Monitor progress of work</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Chase up outstanding work</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Give feedback in a positive way</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Discipline a colleague/employee</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Add up your total</b>			

### Key

- 1 = I'm not good at this/can't do this
- 2 = I can do this
- 3 = I'm confident I can do this well
- If you have mainly 1s then this is a weaker skill area for you.
- If you have mainly 2s then you have an average ability in this skill area.
- If you have mainly 3s then this is a stronger skill area for you.



## Review your responses

**If you have mostly 1s in a skills area, this is a weaker skill area for you. This could be an area for development and you could consider some training or learning to help you become more confident in using this skill.**

If you have mostly 2s in a skills area, this is an average skill area for you. You are fairly confident in using these skills but may need some refresher learning or training to build up your confidence to ensure you are ready to use these in work or a new career.

If you have mostly 3s, then this is a stronger skill area for you. Remember, you need to keep these skills up to date so that you can be successful when looking for work.

Look at the totals on the previous pages and tick the most appropriate box in the table below.

	Mostly 1s	Mostly 2s	Mostly 3s
<b>Team work/interpersonal</b>			
<b>Information technology</b>			
<b>Problem solving/reasoning</b>			
<b>Written communication</b>			
<b>Numerical</b>			
<b>Practical/manual</b>			
<b>Planning and organising</b>			
<b>Verbal communication</b>			
<b>Physical</b>			
<b>Supervisory</b>			

**My key skills are:**

1.

2.

3.

4.

**List your skills which are transferable to a new job.**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

# Skills: what employers want

It is important to understand the skills and knowledge that are in demand by employers both now and in the future. You can use this information as you apply for other opportunities and to help you identify any skills gaps.

## Core skills

	Written communication		Co-operating
	Verbal communication		Leadership
	Investigating and analysing		Numeracy
	Planning and organising		Entrepreneurship
	Negotiating and persuading		

These are the kind of transferable skills you can build on and develop throughout your career. Transferable skills tend to bring the following benefits for candidates and employers:

- **flexibility** - in an increasingly competitive jobs market, companies want to recruit employees who can diversify and complete multiple tasks and roles. When you have a diverse skill set, this will set you apart from the other applicants and shows you have greater flexibility
- **diversity** - the more transferable skills you have, the more diversity you can offer to a potential employer. The experiences that you have had during learning or work experience will have allowed you to develop a range of skills, many of which can be put to good use in any role
- **portability** - the nature of transferable skills means they can be taken with you when you move jobs. As you progress, the skills that you currently have will improve and you will also gain new ones too
- **employability** - building a strong CV or application around your transferable skills will strengthen your chances of success. Although you may not have directly relevant work experience, these transferable skills will demonstrate that you can adapt to new demands.



### Skills for the future: Meta skills

We are moving into a fourth industrial revolution characterised by rapid technological change. Meta skills allow you to adapt and be successful whatever the future brings. These are skills that enable individuals to perform highly today and in a changed world of work they will be required of all of us.

They are not new but will be needed by more people in greater depth. It is likely you have some of these skills already and if you have a willingness to keep developing these skills you will be highly employable.

**Self Management:** how you manage your current situation  
Focus, Integrity, Adaptability, Initiative

**Social Intelligence:** how you connect with the world  
Communicating, Feeling, Collaborating, Leading

**Innovation:** how you create your own change  
Curiosity, Creativity, Sense making, Critical thinking

### Something to think about

**Skills gaps: Are there skills you need to acquire or develop? How can you do this?**

Skills	How
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

Speak to a Careers Adviser about how to identify training, learning or another opportunity to help you acquire, develop and strengthen the skills you need now and in the future.

# Identifying your strengths

**Strengths are things you are naturally good at. Knowing your strengths is useful when you are exploring your choices. Being able to describe your strengths will help you to sell yourself effectively to employers in application forms and CVs, and at interview. Using your strengths in work means you learn faster, feel happier and are more motivated and confident.**

If you are good at something, you will find it easier. That means you will feel more confident and engaged, and perform better. When you use your strengths, you're doing things that you have a natural flair for. You'll be able to pick things up quickly, get things done and accomplish your goals.

You won't suddenly become more confident overnight. It is more like steadily turning up a dial as you use your strengths more and more. You'll start to achieve success, and make progress. You'll feel good. And those things put together start to add up to make you feel more confident. With confidence comes resilience – so even if things do go wrong, you don't feel like giving up. You see how you could change things for the better and say, 'What about trying this instead?' rather than 'I've had enough'.

By completing the Strengths questionnaire on [myworldofwork.co.uk](http://myworldofwork.co.uk), you will receive a report about your results. This describes what your strengths mean, gives suggestions of how you can use them and helps you talk about them on your CV or at interviews.

## **Strengths-based approach**

Most people come across best when they are talking about things they enjoy so it can be easier and more pleasurable to speak about your strengths in an application or at interview. Some employers use strengths-based interviews to understand if a candidate is a good fit for their organisation and job vacancy.



## Task

Try answering these strengths-based questions. There is not a right or wrong answer but be honest and use examples to illustrate your responses.

**What are you good at?**

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**What do you like to do in your spare time?**

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**Describe a successful day for you**

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**What do you enjoy doing the most? Why?**

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# Identifying your achievements

**Your achievement in a job is the proof that you have the experience and skills that you claim to have.**

A potential employer can check whether you have a specific skill and they can test whether you have specific knowledge. The employer cannot check that you are able to apply that skill and knowledge to a given situation. They will not know whether you are a person 'who gets things done' until you are appointed.

The main guide to your ability is your past achievements. The increasing use of competency based questions in application forms and interviews indicates that employers believe that past behaviour is the best indicator of future performance. Your achievements give a potential employer confidence that you will be able to do the job. Recognising your past achievements, identifying them clearly and being able to speak about them with confidence is vital to achieving success.

## **What have I achieved?**

Achievements can be hard to identify because often we take for granted the things we do well and that make a difference. It is easy to regard an achievement as being "just part of the job" without realising what is says about our abilities.

## **How to describe your achievements: features v benefits**

In thinking about your achievements, you need to distinguish between features and benefits. For example, an estate agent may recommend a house to you because it 'features' direct access onto the local golf course but the feature is unlikely to make you decide to buy the house unless you are a golfer. The feature is of no benefit to you if swimming is the only sport that interests you.

A good salesperson knows that customers don't buy features – they buy benefits. When you are about to make a purchase, you think what you want the product to do for you then look around for something that meets your requirements. The salesperson will find out what your requirements are and then highlight the appropriate benefits of the product. They will also be able to answer your questions about the product and what it can offer you.

In the job search process, you are the salesperson and the product. A future employer wants to know what benefits you brought to your last employer. An employer will recruit you because they believe you can bring similar benefits to his/her company. Therefore, you need to know what they are and provide practical examples. This might be more sales, lower costs, quicker or simpler operations, better standards of customer care etc.



## **Tip**

### **Use active words to describe your achievements**

Achieved  
Advised  
Attained  
Initiated  
Improved  
Created

Delivered  
Established  
Formulated  
Generated  
Identified  
Implemented

Incorporated  
Pioneered  
Reduced  
Revitalised  
Streamlined  
Upgraded

You will find more examples of action words in **Section 5: Get Noticed.**



### **Achievements assessment**

When writing your CV, completing application forms or preparing for interviews, you should consider the employer's requirements and describe your most important achievements in terms of the benefits you can bring to the organisation. The STAR model can provide a framework to help you when describing your achievements:

**Situation** – the background to the situation

**Task** – what needed to be accomplished

**Action** – the action you took

**Result** – the outcomes achieved

You will find more on the STAR model in **Section 6: First Impressions Count**.



## **Task**

Ask yourself the following questions. Think of a recent job, course or other activity e.g. voluntary work to help you focus on identifying your achievements and use the STAR model to structure your answers.

**When did I feel proudest of my work?**

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**When have I known that I am good at my job?**

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**What did I do to make sure I met targets or objectives?**

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**Which of my actions has received the most praise?**

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**How do I adapt to new ways of working?**

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**What do I do when I am given additional responsibilities?**

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**What happened when I suggested changes to the way work is done?**

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## Sum it up

You have skills, strengths and achievements that are valuable to an employer and this section has helped you identify what they are.

**What skills and strengths would you like to use in the future?**

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**What would it feel like to do a job using the skills and strengths you have mentioned above?**

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**Describe this opportunity or job role.**

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# Identifying what motivates you at work

**The reasons for working are as individual as the person but all people work because the workplace provides something that you need from work. The something that you obtain from your work impacts your morale, your motivation and the quality of your life.**

You will be aware of times when you have felt highly motivated at work and other times when you have felt really demotivated. Do you know what makes the difference between the two? What changes in your working environment cause changes in your attitude to work? What aspects of work motivate you? What is it about work that can demotivate or discourage you?

**Think of a time when you felt highly motivated at work and list the factors which created that motivation.**

1.

2.

3.

4.

It is helpful to think about what matters to you most in work: not just what you can offer work but, also, what work can offer you. When asked, most people will say "money". Of course, what you are paid is important but there is much more to it when it comes to working out what leads to job satisfaction.



# Why do I come to work?

Rank the following factors in order of importance to you in your work where 1 is most important and 5 is least important. Circle your answer:

<b>Good communication between workers and managers</b>				
1	2	3	4	5
<b>Access to training and education</b>				
1	2	3	4	5
<b>Positive relationships</b>				
1	2	3	4	5
<b>Travel from place to place</b>				
1	2	3	4	5
<b>Promotion prospects</b>				
1	2	3	4	5
<b>Opportunities for flexible working</b>				
1	2	3	4	5
<b>Bonuses/reward systems</b>				
1	2	3	4	5
<b>Challenging and rewarding work</b>				
1	2	3	4	5
<b>Team working</b>				
1	2	3	4	5
<b>Good holiday entitlement</b>				
1	2	3	4	5
<b>Regular working hours</b>				
1	2	3	4	5
<b>Commuting distance</b>				
1	2	3	4	5
<b>Socialising with colleagues</b>				
1	2	3	4	5

## Sum it up

Take some time to think about the four main needs you hope will be met by your new job and write your thoughts below:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**This is the end of the section 'What have I got to offer?'. If you still feel you are uncertain how to evaluate your skills, strengths and achievements you may find it useful to review this section or get in touch to discuss things further.**

## SECTION 3

### **Horizon scanning**

**What else is out there? What else can you do? Look at the options available to you and put plans into action through setting goals to help you achieve what you want.**

## Where next?

As you have worked through this book you have spent time thinking about:

- how you feel about the changes you are facing
- your skills, strengths and achievements
- what is important to you about work.

To make an informed choice about your next steps you need to take all these things into account.

The present change represents a chance to move your life in a new direction. You also need to look at the opportunities which exist beyond your current situation. What are the options out there?

This section looks at:

- staying in the same type of work
- change to a different type of work
- flexible working
- learning and training
- development in the workplace
- starting your own business
- voluntary work
- retirement.

Having identified potential options, we then look at how to make decisions about your next steps, the need to set goals to help you achieve what you want and provide tips about putting plans into action.

## What are my options?

### 1. Staying in the same type of work

This option is often overlooked but for many people it's the most realistic way forward. Your starting point should be to consider the following:

- assessing your skills, aptitudes and experience
- finding out about the local labour market
- how to market yourself to an employer i.e. CVs, application forms etc
- finding out about different ways to job hunt e.g. online vacancies, social media, word of mouth.

For further advice and guidance, please get in touch so we can help you to make the most of your potential. In addition, **Section 4: Get Sorted** in this book focussing on job search should be helpful.



## 2. Change to a different type of work

Enforced or voluntary career change can lead to a positive and fulfilling outcome. A new career direction can help you to realise your ambitions. There are several things you need to consider:

- what are my transferable skills?
- what are the entry routes to different occupations?
- can I enter new types of work without training?
- if I need to retrain, what course would be best?
- is there funding available to pay for training?
- how do I market myself to employers and talk to them positively about my change of direction?

A Careers Adviser can help you to identify jobs or careers that are right for you. They can also help you as you plan any career change.

## 3. Flexible working

There are options beyond traditional full-time employment. These include:

- part time work, including having more than one part-time job
- job sharing
- working from home
- compressed hours
- annualised hours
- staggered hours
- temporary/agency work
- contract work, including zero hour contracts
- phased retirement.

This flexibility can offer experience, variety and financial reward. Depending on your circumstances flexible working may be worth considering on a short, medium or long-term basis. Get in touch to discuss this option in more detail.

#### 4. Learning and training

The change that you are considering or facing can provide an opportunity to study or learn something new. This can mean up-skilling to build on existing skills and qualifications to enhance future employment prospects. Or it could mean re-skilling, learning new skills and gaining new qualifications that could lead to a change of career.

Learning opportunities are very flexible. You can learn on a full-time, part-time or open/distance learning basis. There are courses at all levels from beginners to advanced and everything in between! Learning and training can be done through:

- colleges and universities
- private training providers
- community learning centres
- libraries
- open or distance learning
- online or e-learning.

There is a wide range of both vocational and academic qualifications. Vocational qualifications tend to focus on professional and work-based or work-related skills development. Many of these qualifications are backed by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

The SQA also oversees academic qualifications such as Highers, Higher National Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Postgraduate qualifications. A Careers Adviser can provide advice and support in identifying appropriate qualifications.

If you want to get a better job, earn more money or improve your skills, then it's worth thinking about whether more qualifications might help you achieve your goals.

Finding your way through the maze of qualifications and ways to learn and train can be off-putting but help is at hand! Here you will find details of different types of qualifications and how they can fit together. Information in this section will help you if you:

- don't have any qualifications but want to know how to get some
- want to add to current qualifications but don't know how to
- don't know what different qualifications mean and where they can lead.



### Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

To better understand the range of qualifications that are available it is important to have some knowledge of the SCQF. The SCQF is the national qualifications framework for Scotland.

#### Benefits of using the framework

- helps learners plan their learner journey
- helps individuals understand qualifications they are not familiar with
- helps employers understand different types of qualifications and supports effective recruitment and workforce development

- helps education and training providers of all kinds to identify the level that has been studied in a subject and make it easier to transfer credit points between different learning programmes
- provides recognition of a very wide range of learning programmes.

SCQF Levels	SQA Qualifications			Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions	Apprenticeships & SVQs
12			Professional Development Award	Doctoral Degree	Professional Apprenticeship
11			Professional Development Award	Masters Degree, Integrated Masters Degree, Post Graduate Diploma, Post Graduate Certificate	Graduate Apprenticeship, Professional Apprenticeship, SVQ
10			Professional Development Award	Honours Degree, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate	Graduate Apprenticeship, Professional Apprenticeship
9			Professional Development Award	Bachelors / Ordinary Degree, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate	Graduate Apprenticeship, Technical Apprenticeship, SVQ
8		Higher National Diploma, Advanced Diploma	Professional Development Award	Diploma of Higher Education	Higher Apprenticeship, Technical Apprenticeship, SVQ
7	Advanced Higher, Awards, Scottish Baccalaureate	Higher National Certificate, Advanced Certificate	Professional Development Award	Certificate of Higher Education	Modern Apprenticeship, SVQ
6	Higher, Awards, Skills for Work Higher	National Certificate	Professional Development Award National Progression Award		Modern Apprenticeship, Foundation Apprenticeship, SVQ
5	National 5, Awards, Skills for Work National 5	National Certificate	National Progression Award		Modern Apprenticeship, SVQ
4	National 4, Awards, Skills for Work National 4	National Certificate	National Progression Award		SVQ
3	National 3, Awards, Skills for Work National 3	National Certificate	National Progression Award		
2	National 2, Awards	National Certificate	National Progression Award		
1	National 1, Awards				

### Old versus new

If you have not been in education for a while you may need to compare older qualifications with the current qualifications listed on the SCQF. The diagram below helps you compare qualifications from the 1960s through to today.

### Recognition of prior learning

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) means that you can get recognition for learning you have done in a work-based environment and from learning from life experiences to support your personal and career development.

If you have no formal qualifications, RPL can help you to value and build on your learning no matter where that learning has taken place. Using a process of RPL, learners can move onto further study or training and provide evidence of learning that can lead to a formal qualification or gaining SCQF credit points.

RPL can help you to:

- think about the learning you have already achieved and plan how to build on this learning to meet your personal and career goals
- get a place on a programme at a college or university or another learning and training provider, if you don't have the normal entry qualifications but can show that you have the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding
- gain credit towards a qualification to shorten the normal period of learning by evidencing that you already have the knowledge, skills and understanding needed for parts of the programme or qualification (e.g. units or modules)
- increase your self-esteem by recognising your achievements in learning
- plan your career development and educational path
- identify areas of competence and areas requiring further study.





By using RPL learners can benefit in the following ways:

- have the opportunity to reflect on what you have achieved so far through your experiences in terms of your learning and skills
- think about your goals and what you need to do to achieve them: e.g. do a training course, pursue a vocational award, join an educational programme at college or university or other learning and training provider, apply for, or change, jobs
- build confidence enabling you to identify the learning you have gained through experience, recognise your strengths and value your achievements.

The RPL tool can be used for information and guidance on getting credit for your learning. Access the RPL tool at [scqf.org.uk](http://scqf.org.uk).

### **Vocational training if you are facing redundancy, recently redundant or unemployed**

Vocational training is training that emphasises the skills and knowledge required for a job function such as Sage 50 Payroll or a trade e.g. joinery. Training is available across a wide range of subjects and industries, from engineering, construction and manufacturing to IT and communications, creative and digital media, health and social care, and more.

Trainees receive help from a network of training providers and a wide variety of skills and occupations is supported. There is also support to help people find and get jobs or start up their own business. The level of training will depend on your background and work history.

There can be funding for vocational training linked to current labour market opportunities for people who are facing redundancy, recently redundant or unemployed. Check your eligibility with your local Jobcentre Plus or Skills Development Scotland centre. Vocational training can also be self-funded.

### **Community learning and development**

Community-based adult learning includes a range of learning opportunities such as numeracy, literacy, languages, arts, crafts, information and communications technology, creative writing, dance, walking, fitness, sport and courses for personal development. It can be undertaken in a wide variety of community settings.

You can learn in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere on a course to suit your own pace of learning. Courses can be certificated or non-certificated, interest based or job related and you can use your new skills and qualifications to move on to more advanced levels of learning. Childcare support and crèches are made available where possible.

Your local council's website will have details of how to get in touch with your local Community Learning team.

### **Libraries**

Your local library may offer tutor-led computer classes as an informal way to learn about computers, from the basics of switching on a computer and using the Internet, to courses certificated by the British Computer Society. Contact your local library for details.

## Further and higher education

Further education includes:

- modules
- City and Guilds
- access courses
- National Certificates.

These courses can be taken at a college which may offer different ways of studying:

- full-time
- part-time
- evening
- flexible and distance learning.

If you're going to college to study a further education course, funding might be available through the college. The level of funding, and whether you're eligible for it, depends on your circumstances. The best thing to do is contact the college and speak to the funding office. They'll be able to give you advice on what's available and how to apply.

Higher education means studying for a Postgraduate qualification, Degree, Professional Development Award (PDA), Higher National Diploma (HND), Higher National Certificate (HNC), Diploma in Higher Education (Dip HE) or a Certificate in Higher Education (Cert HE) at a university or college.

If you want to study full-time at university at undergraduate level:

- you must apply through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)
- you can use their online system to apply for up to five courses
- for most courses, the closing date is 15th January.

Full details of courses and the application process are available from UCAS [ucas.ac.uk](https://ucas.ac.uk)

If you want to study for a Higher National Certificate, Certificate in Higher Education, Higher National Diploma, Diploma in Higher Education or a Professional Development Award at a further education college you normally apply direct to the institution.

Many HNC, HND, CertHE, DipHE and PDA courses link with degree courses. Completing one of these courses may allow you to gain entry to a degree course at university.

For higher education, The Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) provides funding, including tuition fees, bursaries and loans. Check if you meet their eligibility criteria, and if your course is covered. You need to apply to SAAS in each year of your course. There's lots of helpful information on their website: [saas.gov.uk](https://saas.gov.uk).

## Access courses

The Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) supports access to higher education for adult learners. SWAP access programmes run at colleges across Scotland and are a proven route into hundreds of degree courses at partner universities. The programmes are specifically designed for adults who have no or few qualifications and are returning to education after a gap, and who have the motivation and ability to go on to study at university or for a higher-level qualification at college.

SWAP provides full-time, one year access programmes across a range of subject areas. This includes programmes relating to science, engineering, social sciences, humanities, education, languages, business, law, social work, nursing, allied health professions, medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine. Programmes are run by colleges across Scotland. Successful completion of a SWAP access programme enables students to progress to a range of degrees at SWAP partner universities.

Find out more at [scottishwideraccess.org](https://scottishwideraccess.org)



### Pre-entry access course

Some universities run this course which is designed for students who have completed school education and who have gained some further life or work experience, and who wish to undertake degree level study but do not have the normal general entrance requirements of the university, or who have been away from study for some time. It aims to equip you with the necessary skills for undergraduate study, as well as familiarising you with what a university has to offer.

No formal academic qualifications are required and the course tends to run one evening per week over the academic year. If the pre-entry certificate is completed successfully the student may, dependent on the level of performance, be considered for entry to a range of courses at degree level at one or more higher education establishments.

### The Open University in Scotland

The Open University (OU) [open.ac.uk](http://open.ac.uk) is the UK's largest university, the only UK university dedicated to distance learning. Distance learning gives you the flexibility to study when and where you want at your own pace. There are no entry requirements and the OU is open to everyone.

Funding can be available via the SAAS part-time fee grant if your income is below a certain level.

How distance learning works:

- you'll study with other students, online from your home, work or on the move
- a dedicated tutor, an expert in your subject area, supports you on each module
- your tutor marks your assignments, answers your questions and meets with your tutor group either online or in person throughout your study

- study materials are mostly online via your personal module website and you'll also be sent CDs, DVDs and books if they are right for your subject
- you'll have a lot of flexibility but still have deadlines for assignments and exams.

### Adult residential college

Newbattle Abbey College is Scotland's only residential adult education college. It is a national college designed specifically to meet the needs of adults with few or no qualifications returning to education looking for a second chance to learn. Students go on to study at university and college, or directly into employment.

Taking the first steps back into education can be daunting; at Newbattle extensive support is provided for students within a community environment. Learners benefit from high quality teaching in tutorial groups from tutors who are committed to help you build up your confidence and who will encourage you to enjoy the learning experience.

Newbattle has extended its curriculum in recent years to include five full-time courses including the core Access to Higher Education Course in Arts & Social Sciences, as well as various part-time courses. Find out more at [newbattleabbeycollege.ac.uk](http://newbattleabbeycollege.ac.uk)

### Adult achievement awards

Newbattle Abbey College is also the national accreditation centre for adult achievement awards which give learners the opportunity to gain a qualification for the learning they have undertaken in a variety of places:

- in the community
- at work
- in the home
- in college
- in volunteering programmes.

The awards are currently available at four levels; SCQF Levels 2, 3, 4 and 6. There are no entry requirements for the awards.

#### **Additional support needs**

Colleges and universities in Scotland provide specialist guidance and learning support to students with disabilities. If you have additional support needs it is useful to talk to college/university staff before you apply. Most universities have a Disability Co-ordinator who will arrange departmental visits and advise on equipment and support.

**The Big Plus** is a free service that puts you in touch with a local tutor to help you build confidence and skills in reading, writing and numbers. You can choose where and what you want to learn and it can take just a couple of hours per week. Call 0800 917 8000 for more information or visit [thebigplus.com](http://thebigplus.com)

#### **Lead (Linking Education and Disability)**

**Scotland** services are confidential and free to disabled people, those affected by a disadvantage and carers. Lead Scotland have co-ordinators in areas throughout Scotland who can support you on your learning journey.

Some people find their own answers and solutions quickly after a few meetings with a co-ordinator. Others might find they need more time and support to get things in place, including the support of other organisations, volunteer support or the loan of a computer or device.

Visit [lead.org.uk](http://lead.org.uk). There is also has a helpline and information service which is Scotland wide. Call 0800 999 2568.

## **5. Development in the workplace**

The opportunities for work based learning have never been greater. The notion of lifelong learning has become a reality and many employees and employers embrace learning as a means for personal career advancement and to meet business objectives.

Qualifications and skills may be enhanced through:

- on-the-job training through Modern Apprenticeships, Graduate Apprenticeships or SVQs
- higher and further education
- in-house training
- distance learning
- flexible learning.

An employer may have a staff development scheme in place but, increasingly, employees are expected to take responsibility for their own learning and development. Updating qualifications or gaining new ones can enhance long-term employability in an ever-changing job market. Opportunities may be employer funded, self-funded or paid for using another funding source.



## 6. Starting your own business

This can be an attractive option for some people and an opportunity to take charge of your working life. Starting a business is not easy and there are various questions that you need to consider:

- What service/product will you offer?
- Is there a demand for it?
- Can you afford the risks?
- Do you have the necessary skills?

Business Gateway can offer a wide range of practical advice and support on how to start up and develop a business. All services are free. Assistance and impartial advice to people starting or growing their business is available by a combination of:

- online resources: handy guides, articles, videos and templates
- workshops and events: run across Scotland, tackling topics from bookkeeping and social media strategy to e-commerce and exporting
- local offices: access one-to-one business advice.

Call Business Gateway on 0300 013 4753 or visit the website [bgateway.com](http://bgateway.com).

## 7. Voluntary work

Volunteering can help you and other people. There is an enormous demand for volunteers and some projects may offer training which can be valuable in itself and within the job market. You may learn new skills or gain experience that could help you find paid work. It can give you an interest and a focus in your life that you may miss while going through a period of change. There are certain occupational areas, such as social and caring professions, where it is especially useful to have gained voluntary experience before moving into paid employment.

### Benefits of volunteering

- gain confidence - volunteering can help you gain confidence by giving you the chance to try something new and build a real sense of achievement
- make a difference - volunteering can have a real and valuable positive affect on people, communities and society in general
- meet people - volunteering can help you meet different kinds of people and make new friends
- be part of a community - volunteering can help you feel part of something outside your friends and family
- learn new skills - volunteering can help you learn new skills, gain experience and sometimes even qualifications
- take on a challenge - through volunteering you can challenge yourself to try something different, achieve personal goals, practise using your skills and discover hidden talents
- have fun - most volunteers have a great time, regardless of why they do it.

Volunteer Scotland can help get you started [volunteerscotland.org.uk](http://volunteerscotland.org.uk)

## 8. Retirement

Retirement is a period of life that people should look forward to as their own time to do what they want. However, it's important to prepare for retirement if you are to get the most out of it as the adjustment from working life can be quite a shock for some people.

Planning for retirement is more important today than it has ever been. Retirees are much healthier, much more active and can expect to live much longer – a whole new phase of life and opportunity is opening up. In addition, the removal of the Default Retirement Age means that the decision when to retire is now in your own hands.

It is extremely important to understand the opportunity that retirement presents for you personally and to remove any concerns you may have to help you decide when you want

to retire, or partially retire. Otherwise there is a danger you will continue working and miss the opportunity that retirement presents.

Unlike other phases of life, when you retire there are far fewer constraints – for most of our lives we are constrained by the demands of school, career and maybe children. For the first time, we are faced with a period of maybe 25-30 years when we essentially write our own 'job description'. That requires careful thought and planning to avoid any pitfalls, ensure you make the most of it and enjoy a balanced retirement.

A pre-retirement workshop can provide relevant information to get you thinking about what you need to do when exiting full time employment and what happens next.

Visit [nowandnext.scot](http://nowandnext.scot) for more information.

## Sum it up

List below the potential options you would like to investigate further.

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# What job would suit me?

Careers research can help you further explore what is out there and help you narrow down your options. Often people are limited in their knowledge about the world of work, especially if you've worked in one sector or industry for a while. It is good to look at opportunities you already know about but, perhaps more importantly, to explore ways to find out about opportunities you don't yet know about.

It is easy to have preconceptions about what a job involves and the labour market in general. The job profiles on [myworldofwork.co.uk](http://myworldofwork.co.uk) describe essential up-to-date information about each job, including:

- what the work is like and what tasks you would expect to perform
- what kind of person does well in that type of work – their skills and personal qualities
- typical pay scales
- what you need to get in and to get on – qualifications, training
- the main types of employers
- links for further information.

If you've got a job in mind, you can search for it specifically but, even if you haven't, it can be useful just to browse through the job profiles. This can give you career ideas. On each profile, there are related careers. This means that if one job interests you but isn't quite ideal, you can see if a similar job might suit you more.

## Filling in the blanks

You can use the details in a job profile like a checklist to see which of these things match your own experience. Are these skills that you have? Do the personal qualities match your strengths? Is all this adding up to the kind of job you want to do? For each task or skill, check whether you've done it in a previous job. If you haven't, can you think of a time you've done something similar in a different environment?

This also helps you identify things that you haven't done at all. Is there a qualification required for this kind of work? Do you lack experience in an element of the job? Would you be embarking on something completely new? If it is still a job that appeals to you there are ways you can develop those skills, whether it's through taking a course, volunteering or maybe getting some work experience.

You can use job adverts in the same way by considering all the requirements of a job vacancy you are interested in. You may need to achieve more before you will be ready to apply for that type of job but this type of information gives you a realistic picture of what an ideal candidate would be like.

Another part of the jigsaw is to research the labour market. Is the job you want to do available locally or within a reasonable travelling distance, or would you need to relocate to take up a post? This can be an important part of making a well informed, realistic decision about the ideal job for you.

### A little extra research

Once you've identified jobs you're interested in, it is useful to talk to someone who is in that type of work. Use your network: friends, family and people you know, including ex-colleagues, who may be doing that job. They can tell you about the work they do or may be able to introduce you to someone else who can help.

Don't worry if there is no-one in your current network who can help – you can develop new networks by approaching people for information and advice by email, letter, telephone and social media. You can use “practitioner forums” on networking site LinkedIn to connect and collaborate with others.

Talking to people helps you get information about what it's like to do that job and typical routes in to that type of work. You get the benefit of their expertise and you can figure out if the job sounds like it's for you. It may even give you access to job vacancies so you've nothing to lose. This approach is known as Informational interviewing. You will find more on this in **Section 4: Get Sorted**.

Get in touch with Skills Development Scotland if you would like to talk through your ideas confidentially with a professionally qualified Careers Adviser.



## Moving on

**Most people do not have clear goals in life. The jobs people do and the things they achieve are often dictated as much by circumstance as by choice. If you have clear goals and make plans to achieve them you are much more likely to succeed.**

### Accident or opportunity?

You might regard the present change as just another accidental occurrence in your progress through life. Or you can see this time of change as an opportunity to review where your career is going and plan how you would like it to develop.

To achieve a positive change, you need to know:

- how important you want work to be in your life
- what you have to offer
- which opportunities you would like to consider
- what a job or course demands.

This book has taken you through this process. The next stage is to set goals to help you achieve what you want.

### Setting goals

Having goals in life can help you to have purpose and focus. It can be useful to set a variety of goals. If you are not sure what sort of things your goals should be about try setting at least one goal in each of these categories:

- work/career
- education
- health
- relationships
- family
- finances
- social life
- fun/hobbies
- personal development.

Other goals may be set as a result of your first goal. For instance, in the first category your goal could be what you would like to be doing career-wise in 5 years' time. If you need extra qualifications or knowledge to achieve it, put those in the second category.

Be **SMART** about setting your goals

- to be **Smart** your goals need to be **Specific**. A vague objective is not an objective at all. What you are aiming to achieve must be tangible and clearly defined
- to be **sMart** your goals need to be **Measurable**. If the aim is measurable then you can tell whether you have achieved it or not
- to be **smArt** your goals need to be **Achievable**. That is, you have some confidence that you will get to where you want to be
- to be **smaRt** your goals need to be **Realistic**. They need to be practical and relevant to your present life. When you set aims it is useful to get a 'reality check' on them by talking them over with a friend or your Careers Adviser
- to be **smarT** your goals need to be **Time bound**. Set time limits within which you expect to achieve each aim. If the time taken is too long, you may get discouraged. Achievement times will be different for different goals.

Here is an example of a **SMART** goal related to work/career:

**Specific** – a job that is part-time, and requires my numeracy skills and experience in the financial sector.

**Measurable** – which pays within an acceptable income range for my financial needs. I can use it to supplement the small pension I will receive.

**Achievable** – which is a job I can do using my knowledge of SAGE accounting systems.

**Time bound** – which I can find within the next three months. I plan to start looking for work after a two-week holiday abroad.

**Realistic** – is located within one hour's travelling distance by train from my home.

## Sum it up

Set your first SMART goal.

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### Review your progress

Once you're happy with the goals you've set, don't put the list away and forget about it. Try to review your goals on a regular basis - daily or weekly, for instance - and update them where necessary. Make a note of your progress, and consider changing your approach to any of the goals you feel you're not getting anywhere with.

Remember, it's natural that your goals will change over time, especially when your priorities change, so try to be flexible and let go of any goals you feel are no longer relevant.



# Action planning

**SMART goal setting is not for everyone, in which case it can be helpful to consider the steps you need to get to a goal rather than simply focussing on the goal itself. Aim to be forward thinking and look to where you want to go then take some time to work out what you need to do to get there. Some people find it helpful to jot down their plans and lay out how they will achieve them.**

An action plan can help keep things clear in your head as you consider your next steps. It does not have to be detailed. It could just contain some brief bullet points outlining ideas or issues you want to consider – and things you would like to find out. It could look like the following examples.

## **Action plan (redundancy)**

### **My current situation**

- I am facing redundancy from my job
- I have worked in this company for 20 years
- I would like to consider new areas of work.

### **What would I like to do?**

- I want to move into care work
- I would also think about working with children in a nursery
- I have always enjoyed working with people and volunteer at the local Mothers and Toddlers group when I can.

### **What steps do I need to take to get there?**

- I need to consider re-training
- I need to find out more about what type of training is available, where it is and how long it lasts
- I need to look into finance for college/ training
- I need to discuss this with my family to look at what it would mean financially for us
- I need to make an appointment to discuss my plans with a Careers Adviser.

## **Action plan (Workplace development)**

### **My current situation**

- I work as an administrator with the local council
- I am not really enjoying my current job but don't want to leave this organisation as I have good working conditions and have been contributing to a pension
- I want to find out how I can move into other council jobs.

### **What would I like to do?**

- I enjoy dealing with customers on the phone and trying to sort out any problems they have
- I don't mind dealing with paper work but would like to do this less than I do just now
- I think I would like to work more closely with the public: I do speak to customers on the phone but I don't see them face-to-face.

### **What steps do I need to take to get there?**

- I need to start looking at all the internal vacancies
- The council is setting up a new call centre where customers access a 'one-stop shop' for all council services. I will arrange to speak with my line manager to see if I would be suited to the work. I need to find out if there are any customer facing roles available
- I need to consider my own training needs e.g. customer care, computer skills. Is there training that the council offers or should I look for training at a college?

## **Action plan (return to work after a break)**

### **My current situation**

- I am looking to return to work after a break from the labour market
- My previous experience was as a translator/interpreter
- I have two children at primary school and I am their sole carer.

**What would I like to do?**

- I would like to work part-time
- I want to be able to use my language skills, perhaps as a private tutor and/or tour guide
- I need to be able to get work using public transport.

**What steps do I need to take to get there?**

- I need to find out about local after school care
- I will arrange to speak to an adviser at Business Gateway to find out about support into self-employment
- I will find out about voluntary opportunities for tour guiding to help enhance my CV.

**Action plan (retirement)****My current situation**

- I am taking early retirement from my job as a Mechanical Engineer
- I have a good pension but I want to keep working
- I want to consider a new job area
- I have some responsibilities for training in my current job and really enjoy this
- I also coach a local football team and enjoy working with young people.

**What would I like to do?**

- I have been looking into two types of work: teaching (technical) and training
- I want to try to identify other jobs/careers that I can do.

**What steps do I need to take to get there?**

- I have researched qualifications in teaching – but I need to find out more about funding and entry requirements
- I need to check how my pension may affect funding for any course at university
- I have heard about a training qualification but need to know if it is the most appropriate for the job I want to do
- Would I need to pay for this qualification?
- I would like to speak to a Careers Adviser to discuss my options further.

**This is end of the section 'Horizon scanning'. If you are still unclear about your options or your goals and how to arrive at a plan to achieve them you may find it useful to review this section or get in touch to discuss things further.**

## SECTION 4

### **Get sorted**

Where to find opportunities, how to keep track of what you achieve during your job search, and the role of social media in the process.

# Looking for a job

**You are now in a position where you have a greater understanding of your skills, strengths and achievements. You have also considered the options available to you in the next stage of your life. By working through the previous sections of this book you will have developed self awareness by finding out how important you want work to be in your life, what you want from work and what you can offer work, and opportunity awareness – what opportunities you would like to consider, what work can offer you and what work demands. Now you are ready to begin job hunting.**

Looking for a job can be a job in itself. You will improve your chances of finding work by using a wide range of methods. It is also helpful to keep a daily log of job seeking activities. However, don't spend every hour on your job search. Timetabling other activities into your day will give you a better balance, for example, exercise improves physical and mental resilience.

Also, you can use the time to build on your skills, qualifications and experience. Volunteering allows you to explore new career areas as well as develop particular expertise that may be of interest to a potential employer.

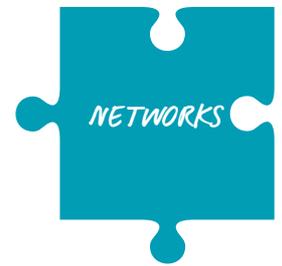
Work shadowing is all about observing someone in their day-to-day role. It helps you gain an in-depth knowledge of a workplace and a real sense of whether the job is right for you. A relevant education or training course can add to your qualifications as well as help keep you motivated and confident. Consider short term contracts and temporary jobs as a stepping stone to more permanent employment.

## **Know the labour market**

Labour market information (LMI) helps you understand the workings of the labour market and the factors that influence it. It informs you about current and future demand for jobs which enables you to target your learning and job search effectively.

It is important that you are familiar with the labour market local to where you wish to apply for work. The job situation will change from area to area and is influenced by local, national and global economic trends. LMI can be obtained online, via social media, in newspapers and from television reports. Visit [skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk](http://skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk) for information on **Jobs and Skills in Scotland** and **Regional Skills Assessments**.

It is worth remembering that the pace of change in technology means that even with the best available information it can be difficult to predict and prepare for what may lie ahead. Being able to adapt to new work environments is increasingly important. There is more on this in **"Skills: what employers want"** in **Section 2**.



# Where to find jobs

## Online job boards and websites

The internet is a very cost-effective way for employers to advertise vacancies. Get to know the recruitment websites or job boards that work for you. A good starting point is the Find a Job on **myworldofwork.co.uk**. Other sites will give you access to employer and recruitment agency jobs. Make the most of the help available by uploading your CV to relevant job sites and registering for job alerts.

### Note down other useful websites here:

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## Employer/specialist websites

Some employers advertise vacancies directly on their own website. Many encourage you to apply online and they often list a contact person so you can easily follow the progress of your application. Some organisations only recruit at certain times of year and details can be found on their website. You can find the web addresses of companies by using a search engine e.g. **google.co.uk** or a business finder such as **yell.com**.

Specialist websites can cover particular industries or career sectors e.g. **myjobscotland.gov.uk** for Scottish jobs in local government, **goodmoves.com** for job vacancies in the voluntary sector and **apprenticeships.scot** for apprenticeship vacancies in Scotland.

## Networking and speculative approaches

Word of mouth is an excellent way to find job opportunities. Use networks that already exist by contacting friends, family and ex colleagues to let them know you are looking for work. They may be able to give you useful contact names, recommend you to someone in their organisation or provide general advice and information about their industry.

You can also use social media to boost your career prospects. Consider using social

networking sites to widen your network e.g. contact someone working for an organisation of interest to you. Social networking sites are used by job seekers to network and develop relationships with staff in targeted employers. LinkedIn is one of the most commonly used sites, but also check out Twitter, Facebook and sites that are exclusive in terms of membership e.g. your educational alumni or professional institutes.

The more you know about an employer and the kind of work they do, the easier it is to target appropriate organisations/companies with a job specific CV and covering letter. If you have researched the name of the person who fields applications and address your letter or email to them, your CV is more likely to be read. Tell the employer what you can do for them and why you are suited to the job. Also, let them know if you are willing to consider a range of options such as a job, work experience, work shadowing or a visit/meeting.

For more on networking and using a speculative approach see '**Explore the hidden job market**' later in this section.

### Recruitment agencies

Agencies handle all types of vacancies and can specialise in certain career areas. Many will advertise in the Yellow Pages **yell.com** under 'Recruitment Consultants'. You can search the Recruitment and Employment Confederation website **rec.uk.com** for lists of agencies dealing with your chosen field and location. Generally, agencies are looking for people with a proven track record in certain jobs which can easily fit the specific requirements of a vacancy.

Your initial contact could be by telephone, email or via their website. You may be asked to come in for an interview or simply to send in your CV. Try to build a relationship with the agency and keep in touch to remind them that you are still actively looking for work. It is worth remembering that agencies work on behalf of the employer not the job hunter and you may need to shop around to find the right agency for you.

### Press advertising

Specialist/trade journals and national/local newspapers are still a source of vacancies though increasingly likely to have an online presence besides a printed edition as this is far more economical.

Business sections and general articles of newspapers and news websites can also be useful as sources of information about growth sectors, organisational structures and contact names.

### Jobcentre Plus

Use the 'Find a job' service at <https://findajob.dwp.gov.uk> to search and apply for full or part-time jobs in Scotland, England and Wales. You can search for jobs without an account but to apply you need to create an account or sign in.

### Help for disabled people

The Disability Confident scheme aims to help employers make the most of the opportunities provided by employing disabled people. It is voluntary and has been developed by employers and disabled people's representatives. When you're looking for work, look on adverts and application forms for the Disability Confident symbol.



This symbol means:

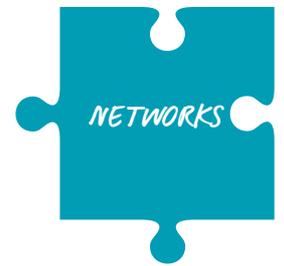
- the employer is committed to employing disabled people
- you'll be guaranteed an interview if you meet the basic conditions for the job.

'Find a job' also lets you search for jobs with Disability Confident employers.

### Programmes and grants

Your work coach at Jobcentre Plus can tell you about programmes and grants to help you back into work. These include:

- **Access to Work** - money towards a support worker or for the cost of equipment or travelling to work
- **Specialist Employability Support** - to help you get ready for employment or become self-employed.



### Peer support

Do you know anyone else who is looking for work? Support from someone who understands your situation can be very beneficial. Why not meet up once a fortnight to discuss progress as well as swap tips about job search techniques and share vacancy information? This can really help with keeping your motivation levels high. If you are facing redundancy, make sure you swap contact details before leaving your current employer to maintain these networks.

### Recruitment events

Various organisations arrange events which give jobseekers the opportunity to speak directly to employers about opportunities available. Jobs fairs are an excellent way to find out about job recruitment in your area, pick up application forms and even secure an interview there and then. At the very least, these events will help you build useful contacts as well as gain industry and company knowledge. Make sure that you go prepared to speak to employers and with an up-to-date CV.

Try searching for job fairs in your area on [eventbrite.co.uk](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk).

### Other places to look for jobs

Don't forget radio, television, adverts on buses and trains, cards in local shop windows and supermarket job vacancy display boards.



## Tip

### Keep a record

It can be helpful to record details of which jobs you apply for and when but also contacts you have made. Hold on to copies of job adverts, application forms and covering letters and the versions of the CV you used. This could be in a paper or electronic file. This will help you keep track of your progress as well as provide proof of your job seeking activities which may be required by Jobcentre Plus.

# Explore the hidden job market

## What is the hidden job market?

The hidden job market consists of opportunities that, unlike the open job market, are not widely publicised. This means that jobs are not advertised in newspapers, recruitment agencies, Jobcentre Plus or on the internet. These jobs exist for people who come to the employer's attention through employee recommendations, referrals from reliable associates or by direct contact from the job seeker. This method of finding work is often termed 'word of mouth'.

## What are the advantages of exploring the hidden job market?

Everyone can benefit from investigating the hidden job market as the chances of success can be greatly increased. It is estimated that around 60-70% of all jobs are never advertised. Therefore, by restricting yourself to applying for advertised positions, you are only accessing 30-40% of the potential jobs available at any given time.

Since opportunities are not widely publicised, you will face less competition. Also, the type and number of jobs available tends to be high because employers often find it cheaper and faster to recruit for jobs by this method.

## How can I access the hidden job market?

Opportunities within the hidden job market can be accessed by '**networking**' and '**speculating**'. These techniques are powerful and effective ways of finding a job.

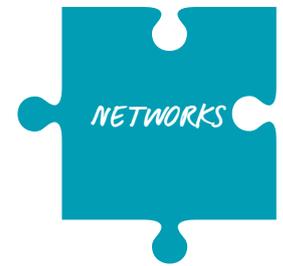
- **networking** involves developing a list of personal and professional contacts, informing them you are job searching and asking them to point you in the direction of anyone they know who may be able to help you
- **speculating** involves using the information you have gained from networking and other research to make direct approaches to employers to ask about opportunities within their organisation.

## Get networking

You are probably already skilled in networking without realising it. Have you ever found a plumber by asking around for a recommendation of someone reliable? Or found a babysitter through a friend of a friend?

Often known as 'word of mouth', the term 'networking' can put people off, but it's not rocket science. It just means getting in touch with people and it's a simple and very effective way to find out about:

- different roles or careers and what they involve
- how to break into a job or business sector
- information about specific companies and what they're like as employers
- referrals to people who can help you further
- how best to layout your CV
- job opportunities.



### Start to spread the word

Get into the habit of talking to people about the job you're looking for. Be clear about what you want and ask them to let you know if they hear of anything. Start with your friends, family, neighbours and familiar contacts to get comfortable with how best to get the conversation started. Then create a potential contact list of:

- people you knew at school, college or university, or colleagues from previous jobs: you may have stayed in touch or you can find them again on LinkedIn or Facebook under "Alumni" groups
- people you meet every day, for example at clubs, the gym or through your children's school
- friends of friends, when you know second-hand of people in the right job sector.

You can then go on to find new contacts, for example by joining and contributing to professional groups on LinkedIn. A basic LinkedIn account will give you all you need for your job search and is free of charge. Create an account at [linkedin.com](https://www.linkedin.com).

#### 1. Complete Your LinkedIn profile

This is like an online CV but you have the advantage of being able to add presentations and documents as well as links e.g. to YouTube videos, your Blog or Twitter feed. As with your CV, check that the spelling and grammar are correct.

Your profile can be a powerful part of your personal brand. All registered LinkedIn users will be able to view it (unless you set it to private mode). You can also have a public profile that can be found by external search engines so that even people who are not registered with LinkedIn can see it.

LinkedIn's internal search algorithm only finds profiles that rank as "complete," and these can get more than 20 times as many

views as incomplete profiles. It's important, therefore, to complete yours. Here are the essential things to remember:

- add a good-quality photo of yourself. Look smart, smile, and don't have any distractions in shot
- make your profile sparkle by adding a background image (sometimes called a "banner" or "cover" image) that reflects your personality and your profession
- mention your industry and location in your headline. You have up to 120 characters for this
- include a concise summary of who you are, what you do, and what you have to offer. You have 2,000 characters to play with but you don't have to use them all. You can also link to, or upload, six examples of your work
- add your current or most recent position and describe what it involves/d. Be specific. Don't say, for example, that you're a "great communicator" – even if you are one! Instead, give details of your communication skills and examples of how you've used them. Again, you have 2,000 characters
- add your previous work history, education details and at least four skills or areas of expertise. Recruiters and employers use key words to search LinkedIn for job candidates. Fill in the Skills and Expertise section with key words which are most relevant to people hiring in your industry.

#### 2. Start to network

You can look for people you already know who have a profile by using the search facility – you may be surprised how many of your friends and contacts are already signed up. Connect with people you've done business with, studied with or know socially.

You can search for companies too. You can 'follow' companies on LinkedIn so you'll see any vacancies posted. Also, those viewing your LinkedIn profile can see who you follow



## Tip

### Keep personal and professional accounts separate

If you're using a social media account professionally, ensure that all your content is just that – professional! For many people LinkedIn is used for professional contacts and Facebook for personal friends only.

Bear in mind that the number of recruiters looking their candidates up online is increasing so make sure your profiles don't portray you in the wrong way. If your Facebook is personal, make sure that your profile is private and that potential employers can't look through anything you wouldn't want them to.

which shows them the sectors and jobs you are interested in.

If you're keen to work for a certain company, search for their employees. Don't be afraid to send them a message asking to connect, but make sure that you add a personal note letting them know who you are and your area of professional interest.

### 3. Give and receive recommendations and endorsements

Your connections can write "recommendations" for your profile, and offer "endorsements" of your skills, and you can do the same in return.

Recommendations are personal testimonials – like a short reference - that emphasise your professional abilities. Aim to collect a handful of these (between five and 10 is a good rule of thumb) by asking people you've worked with to write one for you. These work best if the person making the recommendation is also on LinkedIn. Ask them to highlight the attributes or achievements that have impressed them rather than making general comments such as "Bella was fun to work with."

Endorsements are simple notifications confirming that you have a certain skill. There is a list of skills to choose from. They may lack the impact of custom-written recommendations but if a connection endorses you for your leadership skills, for example, it can help you to stand out from the crowd.

### 4. Use LinkedIn groups

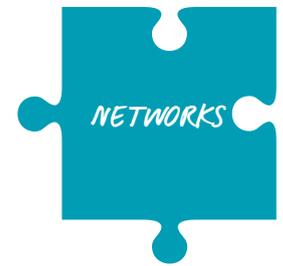
All LinkedIn members can set up or join groups to discuss ideas and share industry news. This can be a great way to develop your professional network. LinkedIn groups can be a valuable source of information, ideas and support. Share your knowledge with people in your groups and they'll likely respond in kind.

You can use the search bar at the top of your profile page to look for interesting groups. Send a request to join and the group administrator will accept you. You can also find new groups via the ones you've already joined. Once you're a group member, you're able to join group conversations, ask questions, and send messages to other members.

### The speculative approach

An effective job search is a targeted job search so before you start to contact employers ensure you have done, or are able to do, the following:

- compile a list of employers you are going to contact. These will be employers that you know have the kinds of jobs on offer that you would like to do based on the research you have done
- ensure you have a named contact for each of the employers you intend to get in touch with
- develop telephone scripts or emails to (a) research information from an employer about a specific job and (b) sell yourself to employers. Get these checked by a Careers Adviser, friend or mentor.



At this stage, you can decide the best way to contact the employer using any or all the following methods:

### 1. Telephone call/email/message via social media

You may feel anxious about getting in touch with people you do not know. The best way to overcome this is to make 'research calls' first. These will give you confidence when making the marketing calls in the future. Research calls will also help you further identify the skills an employer is looking for as well as potential job roles on offer. You can then use this information to tailor your CV and speculative letter to match what the employer is looking for.

Ideally you will have had some contact already via the links you have made through word of mouth, networking and social media.

### 2. Send a CV and speculative letter/email

You should ensure that:

- your CV is targeted to the needs of the employer and/or potential vacancy
- you address the application to a named contact (found out during the research call or via your networking activities)
- in your letter or email explain why you want to work for them and what you can do for them not what the employer can do for you.

### 3. Informational interview

An informational interview isn't like a job interview. It's a discussion with someone working in, or someone who would be hiring for, the type of job you want to get into. Informational interviews can be an excellent way to network and ultimately help land you a job. When approached properly most people will respond positively.

Because, by this stage, you should have a good idea about the employers you would like to work for you may have already used

tools like LinkedIn to find names of people who work in these organisations along with their job titles. Contact them and ask if they'd be willing to meet you to discuss their role.

The more in-person meetings you can have the better. Informal in nature, they are often held with contacts you only know indirectly, for example a second-level connection on business social networking site LinkedIn. They can provide information about the culture, values and environment of an organisation. This is intelligence that a prospective candidate would not find on the organisation website or mission statement and gives you a truer feel of what it would be like to work there.

Create a list of questions to ask at these meetings. The questions should show your initiative and that you are being proactive in setting up such a meeting. For example: What challenges will the organisation face during the coming year? What is a typical day like? What does the individual like/dislike about the company? Where does he/she see him or herself going? These are questions at an organisational as well as individual level.

You can also ask about the industry and, specifically, how people get into it. A face-to-face meeting provides deeper understanding and perspective about a job role. This can help you to target your future applications more effectively and find out about any skills gaps you may have. Sometimes through these types of meetings you may discover new career paths and alternative routes into a job.

Even though it's not a job interview, be prepared. Make sure you have identified your skills, strengths, qualifications, experience and achievements and be able to speak about them with confidence. When you're going to your meeting, dress smartly and make sure you are punctual. Ensure that you are ready to hand over your CV and speculative letter if need be.

An informational interview can also give you practice for future interviews. It enables you to broaden your professional network, manages your expectations and prepares you for a real interview.



## Tip

### Follow up

Maintain a polite and positive approach at all times when dealing with employers whether applying for a job or carrying out research into potential vacancies. Use any contact you make to enhance your understanding of the work you are interested in and actively seek out tips and information on ways to improve your job hunting. Don't underestimate the power of a follow up telephone call, letter or email: it shows an employer you are interested and can further enhance your chances of gaining access to useful information or a job vacancy.

## Sum it up

- use a wide range of methods for seeking opportunities and follow up when you can
- keep a daily log of job seeking activities
- use any spare time to build on your current skills, qualifications and experience
- consider short term contracts and temporary jobs as a stepping stone to more permanent employment
- don't wait for job vacancies: network, network, network!

**This is the end of the section 'Get sorted'. If you still feel you are uncertain how to organise your job search, you may find it useful to review this section or get in touch to discuss things further.**

# SECTION 5

## **Get noticed**

**Practical advice on CVs, application forms and covering letters which are the main tools you will use to apply for opportunities.**

# CVs

## What is a CV (curriculum vitae)?

The words 'curriculum vitae' are Latin for 'course of life' and a CV is traditionally a summary of your experience, skills, strengths, achievements, personal qualities and qualifications. However, it is not simply a list of what you have done in the past: it is a specifically targeted marketing tool to help you get to interview. So, rather than solely considering the tasks you have undertaken in previous jobs, you should think about what you have done that is most relevant to a future employer and prioritise this information.

There is no one CV that will suit every job you are likely to go for. Your CV should be tailored to each job you apply for by matching your skills, strengths, achievements, experience and qualifications to the employer's requirements.

Putting this information together can be a big job. However, once it's done you will have all the core information you need to write different CVs. You can change the content, style, layout etc and easily add or remove information in the future.

Job vacancies often attract many applicants so it's important your CV makes a good impression. Understanding an employer's needs is more than reading the job description. See **Networking** and **Informational interviews** in **Section 4: Get Sorted**.

Your aim is to convince the employer that you are worth inviting for interview. The CV should look good and provide the employer with as much relevant information about you as possible in a clear, concise and logical way. It should be a positive statement about you. To achieve maximum success, you need to have a specific job in mind so that you can focus your thoughts and target your efforts!

## Why do you need a CV?

A CV can be used:

- when applying for a job or when planning for a future change of career
- as the basis for a letter of application or in combination with a short letter of application
- as a reference document to help you answer questions about your experience and skills e.g. when telephoning an employer or at an informational interview
- when canvassing employers for vacancies – you can leave them a copy to refer to
- when completing application forms
- as a way of remembering important information at an interview.

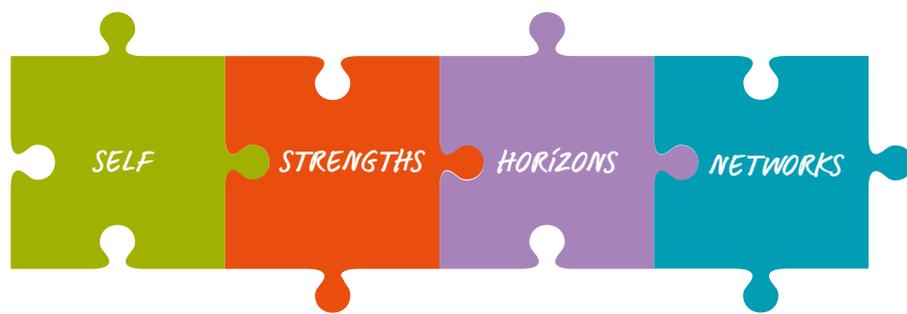
If you are facing redundancy, recently redundant or unemployed, it can help you to consider your skills, strengths and what you have achieved to help you target potential employers effectively.

If you are in employment you may be seeking promotion, considering moving to a different job within your own company or looking for an opportunity with another employer. Your CV can help you to keep a tab on your experience and training, and is a useful tool when applying for jobs.

If you are shortly coming up to retirement but want to remain in the job market or are perhaps considering voluntary work, a CV can be useful in promoting your skills, abilities and achievements.

## The perfect CV?

Bear in mind that professional opinion differs about what makes the perfect CV. Use as many sources of information as possible to find the format that works for you i.e. a CV that secures you that all important interview! We have lots of suggestions to help you.



## Tips

- it is generally accepted that a CV should be no longer than two sides of A4. However, one to three pages is fine if the CV is relevant, to the point and matches the requirements of the job
- consider font size and type. The CV should look professional but also be readable. A handwritten CV is not acceptable
- ensure the CV is in a format that can be read by the recipient when you send an electronic version. See notes on Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) on page 64
- always check for spelling, grammar and punctuation errors. Then check again! Use the computer spellcheck or a dictionary if you are unsure
- prioritise the most relevant information. Engage the reader by highlighting what makes you suitable for the job
- don't include nationality, age, date of birth, National Insurance number, marital status or a photograph
- don't lie. Always be truthful while presenting yourself in the best light. Accentuate the positive
- keep your CV up-to-date, store it safely and tailor it to each job you apply for.

### Things to consider

We have put together a list of issues for which there is not necessarily a right or wrong answer and it will ultimately come down to personal choice. You may wish to talk things over in more detail with a Skills Development Scotland Adviser.

#### What is relevant?

A CV is not simply what you have done in a previous job role but what you can do for a potential employer – this is not necessarily the same thing. Research the job by looking at a job description from the job advert or using a job descriptor from an occupational database. If you are making a speculative approach, canvassing the employer directly can help you find out about what they might be looking for in a potential employee.

### Gaps

Breaks from employment are not unusual and it is best to explain any gaps honestly. Keep explanations brief and to the point. Think about the best place to put information about gaps in your experience, for example would it be better placed in a covering letter rather than the middle of your CV? See later in this section how the heading **Additional information** can be used in a CV.

#### How far back?

Experience and skills can be from previous paid work, learning and/or voluntary work, as well as your most recent job. It is OK to summarise before a certain date, for example you may only want to highlight your past ten year's work experience.

### Qualifications

Think about how best to use the space on your CV. You may not need to list every qualification you have ever done - only those that are required for the job or show your highest level of achievement i.e. there is probably no need to mention school qualifications if you have since done a degree or an apprenticeship. If need be, you can put your full list of qualifications on a separate sheet.

### References

Having a References section with a list of names and contact details, or even a note stating "References available on request" on your CV is unnecessary and no longer expected by employers. However, you must have at least two, preferably three people who you have asked that are happy to be a referee for you. Get in touch with them to find out if they are available and willing to help, and how best they would like to be contacted. And remember to thank them afterwards.

There is more on **References** in this section under **Application forms**.

### Applicant Tracking Systems

Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) are used by many employers, recruitment agencies and job vacancy sites to scan CVs before the top candidates' information is passed to the recruiter. However, research suggests 70-75% of CVs are rejected by ATS so how can you stand the best chance of getting your CV past the computers and read by a real human being?

#### Do:

- use a sans-serif font such as Arial, Calibri, Tahoma or Verdana
- use a .doc or .txt format. Note that while it can be helpful to have your CV in a .pdf format, as most systems can open this, they are not easily read by ATS
- use a font size of 11 as a minimum

- include all keywords and phrases unique to the job you are applying for
- include as much information as you can that matches your skills, qualifications and experience to the job
- put employer names and job titles on the left-hand side of the document
- use a heading such as Work Experience rather than Employment History.

#### Do not:

- include tables, diagrams, pictures or graphics
- use headers or footers
- use abbreviations - this includes dates
- use white words as the computer systems will recognise this trick.

The good news is that Applicant Tracking Systems do not care about the length of your CV. However, it is worth bearing in mind that when your ATS-friendly CV gets past the system and onto the desk of a recruiter it will still have to conform to accepted practice when it comes to writing a CV.

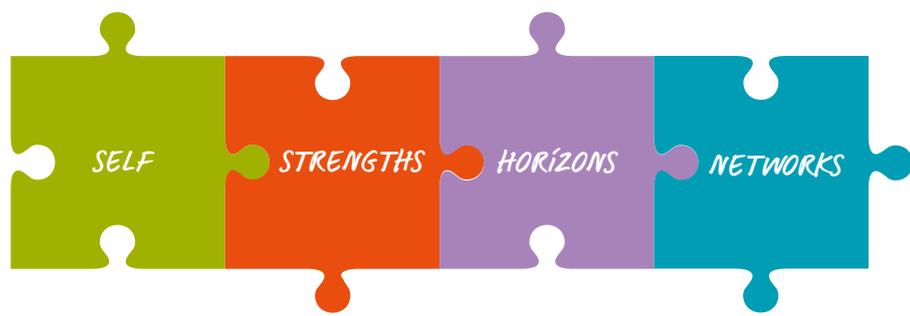
### Getting started CV content

Here are some of the headings you may wish to include in your CV. Their sequence and order of importance on your CV will be determined by the specific job you are applying for and the information you want to get across.

#### Personal details

Include your name and the method by which you would like to be contacted. This could be your postal address, telephone or mobile number, and email. Try to use a personal email address rather than a work one if you are in employment. Make sure the email address is named suitably as it will be one of the first things an employer will see on your CV.

You can also showcase your online presence here by including links to your Twitter, LinkedIn, blog or website.



### Personal profile/career objective

Many CVs start with a personal profile or a career objective. This is a marketing technique that seeks to capture a potential employer's interest right at the start of the CV. A personal profile or career objective must be well written, focused and succinct; we suggest no more than five lines on your CV. You only need about 60 words as long as they match the demands of the job.

This is the place to highlight how your skills and personal qualities are compatible with the job role.

### An example of a personal profile

Care Assistant with a mature and responsible attitude. Sound background delivering home support services to a diverse client base including older people as well as those experiencing learning/physical disabilities and mental health issues. Dedicated to promoting independent living. Comfortable undertaking personal care. Skilled in managing challenging behaviour whilst ensuring the health and safety of clients at all times.

**Think of a job you would like to do and write your own 60 words here:**

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### Strengths

A strength is something you are good at and enjoy doing. In **Section 2: What have I got to offer?** we looked at the value of knowing your strengths and being able to describe them to help an employer understand your natural abilities and what these allow you to do.

There are five strengths families that can be used:

1. Valuing - how we approach the world and what is important to us
2. Communicating – how we give and receive information
3. Motivating – things that drive use to take action
4. Relating – how we relate to other people
5. Thinking – what we pay attention to and how we make decisions.



## Task

Refer to your results from the Strengths questionnaire on [myworldofwork.co.uk](http://myworldofwork.co.uk) and note them down here. Try to think of your own examples of when you have put each strength to good use. We have provided an example for you.

Strength	Definition	Example
Service (Valuing)	You love to help others and will often be found lending a hand	"I look for the best way to serve each customer by putting their needs at the heart of everything I do."

## Achievements

These are things you are proud of either in work or your personal life. Describing your achievements provides evidence that you have the skills and experience that you claim to have. They also set you apart as an "achiever" as opposed to a "doer". You can include these in the **Work experience** section under your job descriptions or in a separate **Achievements** section.

Refer to the task '**What have I achieved?**' you completed in **Section 2: What have I go to offer?** then use the space below to write down your achievements.

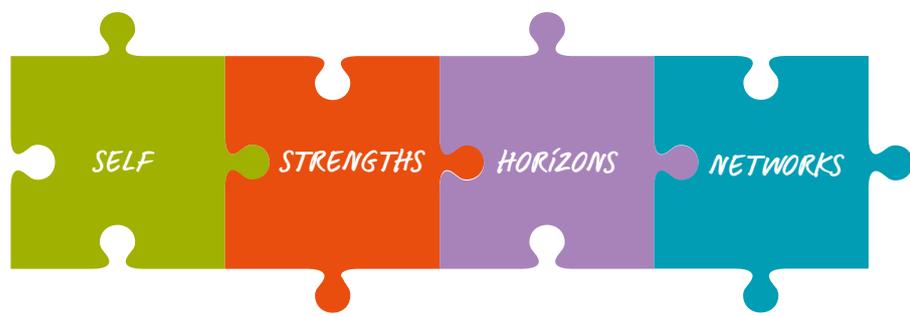
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## Work experience

At its simplest, this is who you have worked for and your job titles. It is generally accepted that you can include dates (month and year is preferable) although this is not necessary.

Include your most relevant experience or work activities. These are the activities you have been involved in which equip you to do the job you are applying for. It could include things like paid employment, voluntary work and running a household.



### Tip

It is good to come across as an “achiever” as opposed to a “doer”. This means ensuring your job descriptions are results-based rather than task-based and will show what you achieved rather than what you did.

Employers want to know about your previous contributions and how you have made a difference so they can envisage you delivering similar achievements in their company. Use “action” rather than “passive” words. See the list of action words later in this section.

## Education/training/qualifications

This can be formal and informal education at all levels, and can include full-time, part-time and open learning, as well as on-the-job training. If you have attended several training courses you may wish to summarise them, highlight only the most relevant, or list them fully on a separate sheet.

Quite often you may only need to put your most recent or highest level of qualification. For example, if you have an HND or degree you may not need to include school qualifications unless they are recent or demonstrate additional skills essential to the job. Many people also complete training in work – remember to include this information if relevant e.g. health and safety, food hygiene, forklift operation, customer care, IT packages.

## Additional information

This is anything you feel is worth mentioning and may be relevant to the job but the information does not fit under any other heading on the CV. It could include such things as car ownership, driving licence, and hobbies and interests. You can also include details of time out of the labour market e.g. to raise your family.

Check the job description/person specification and make sure you have matched every point that you can, but leave out irrelevant information and don't lie.

Use the space below to jot down any additional information you think is relevant.

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## CV examples

We have included an example CV here. There are further CV examples in the **Getting a job** section of [myworldofwork.co.uk](http://myworldofwork.co.uk). There is also advice on CVs with a difference: video, infographic and online.

### **Arthur Rabbit**

8 Watership Down, Warrenville BU65 8UN

07777 123456

Myemail@bobtail.com

[www.linkedin.com/in/arthur-rabbit-730b86177](http://www.linkedin.com/in/arthur-rabbit-730b86177)

**Facilities Manager with strong leadership and administrative experience, and a firm understanding of budgetary controls. Highly skilled in negotiation and prioritisation of tasks.**

### **Key skills and strengths**

- Always interested in facing new challenges and taking a fresh attitude to problem solving.
- Real understanding of good customer service with the aim to provide this at all times.
- Genuine interest in taking a proactive and flexible approach in order to achieve goals for the good of the organisation.
- Excellent organisational and administrative skills for keeping up-to-date records.
- Outstanding leadership qualities and team working abilities.

### **Key achievements**

#### **Property management**

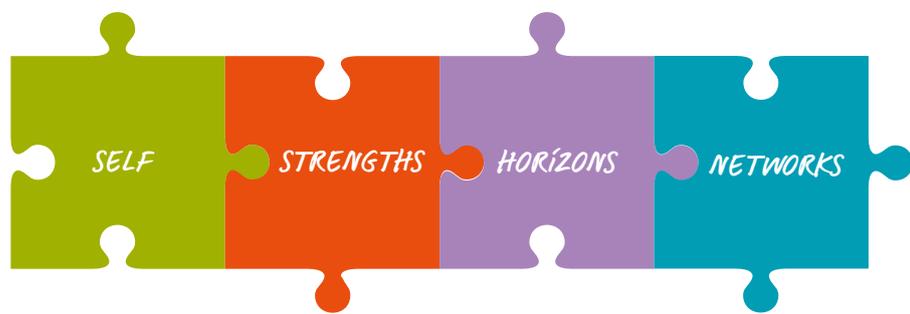
- Dealing with the day-to-day running of a large centre ensuring effective communication between all levels.
- Planning property maintenance and repair: thinking ahead to anticipate, identify and address any risks.
- Resolving any disputes and responding to challenging situations quickly and amicably.
- Using numeracy skills for dealing with budgets.

#### **Health and safety**

- Understanding of the need for a commitment to adhering to the highest Health and Safety standards in all work that is carried out.
- Complying with all Health and Safety Regulations.
- Keeping up-to-date with new legislation and policy.
- Providing a clean and secure environment for customers, clients and staff.
- Maintaining a thorough approach to ensure accuracy of information.
- Carrying out emergency evacuation procedures as required.

#### **Communication**

- Dealing with people of all ages, backgrounds and status, including effective liaison with a range of other agencies.
- Advising on issues and queries from a full range of customers i.e. members of the public, other agencies, police and tenants.
- Providing workable solutions when faced with complaints from customers whilst remaining polite, tactful and firm.
- Carrying out recruitment procedures including creating job advertisements and interviewing suitable applicants.



## **Arthur Rabbit**

### **Employment history**

The Big Shopping Centre, Burrow-in-Furness.

Mar 2008 – present

#### **Centre Operations Manager**

- Overseeing the work of all contractors for security, cleansing and waste management.
- Organising events such as police seminars regarding shoplifting and credit card fraud.
- Chairing committees made up of tenants and Forthclyde Police.
- Purchasing and supplying communications equipment for contractors.

The Big Shopping Centre, Burrow-in-Furness.

Feb 1999 – Feb 2008

#### **Security Operations Manager**

- Worked for Surname Security, previously Secure Security.
- Overseeing all aspects of security for the centre.
- Training security officers in site specific issues.
- Devising and submitting staff rotas.

Secure Security, Burrow-in-Furness.

Oct 1998 – Jan 1999

#### **Security Officer/Supervisor**

- Providing security at various locations.

### **Education and training**

- IOSH Certificate – Managing Safely in Facilities Management
- Aims Certificate – Health and Safety for Site Staff
- Fire Training Certificate
- Passenger Lift Emergency Release Certificate

### **Additional information**

Pre-1998: My previous work history includes construction, security and bar work. Further details can be provided as required.

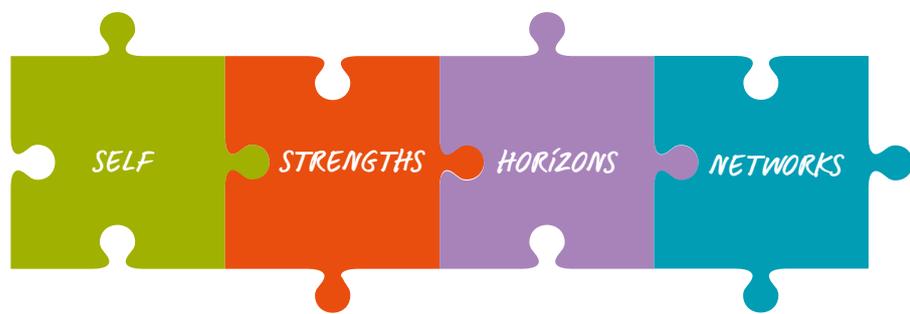
# Words for CVs, applications and letters

Here are some useful words which you can use when producing a CV, completing an application form or writing a letter.

These lists are not exhaustive, but will provide a good starting point for you!

## Action words to describe your achievements

Accelerated	Accomplished	Accounted	Achieved	Acquired
Acted	Adopted	Advanced	Advised	Advocated
Allocated	Amended	Analysed	Appointed	Appraised
Approached	Approved	Arbitrated	Arranged	Arranged
Assembled	Assessed	Assigned	Assisted	Attained
Audited	Authorised	Benefited	Boosted	Briefed
Budgeted	Built	Challenged	Channelled	Checked
Clarified	Classified	Coached	Collaborated	Collated
Collected	Combined	Commended	Commissioned	Committed
Communicated	Competed	Compiled	Compiled	Completed
Composed	Conceived	Conceptualised	Conducted	Consolidated
Constructed	Contributed	Controlled	Converted	Convinced
Co-ordinated	Counselled	Counteracted	Created	Decided
Defined	Delegated	Delivered	Demonstrated	Designed
Detailed	Developed	Devised	Diagnosed	Directed
Discovered	Discussed	Displayed	Distributed	Documented
Drafted	Edited	Eliminated	Enabled	Encouraged
Enforced	Engineered	Enhanced	Ensured	Established
Estimated	Evaluated	Examined	Exceeded	Excelled
Executed	Expanded	Experienced	Extended	Fashioned
Fielded	Financed	Fixed	Followed	Forecasted
Formalised	Formulated	Founded	Fulfilled	Gained
Gathered	Geared	Generated	Guaranteed	Guided
Handled	Helped	Identified	Illustrated	Implemented
Incorporated	Increased	Informed	Initiated	Innovated
Inspected	Installed	Instigated	Instilled	Instructed
Integrated	Interpreted	Introduced	Investigated	Issued
Judged	Justified	Kickstarted	Launched	Lectured
Led	Legalised	Liaised	Listened	Made
Maintained	Managed	Manufactured	Mediated	Mentored
Minimised	Moderated	Monitored	Motivated	Negotiated
Notified	Observed	Operated	Organised	Originated
Oversaw	Performed	Phased	Piloted	Planned

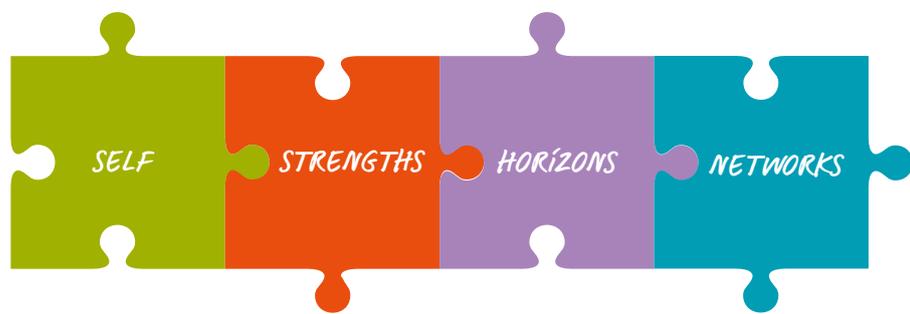


Predicted	Prepared	Presented	Prioritised	Produced
Programmed	Projected	Promoted	Proposed	Provided
Publicised	Published	Purchased	Qualified	Quantified
Queried	Questioned	Reached	Received	Reconciled
Recorded	Recovered	Recruited	Rectified	Redesigned
Referred	Reorganised	Repaired	Reported	Represented
Researched	Resolved	Resourced	Restored	Restructured
Reviewed	Revised	Revitalised	Satisfied	Selected
Shaped	Simplified	Sold	Solved	Spearheaded
Specialised	Stabilised	Started	Stimulated	Stipulated
Streamlined	Strengthened	Stretched	Structured	Studied
Succeeded	Summarised	Superseded	Supervised	Supplied
Supported	Traded	Trained	Transferred	Transformed
Translated	Uncovered	Understood	Undertook	Unified
Updated	Upgraded	Utilised	Vacated	Verified
Visualised	Volunteered	Widened	Won	Worked
Wrote				

### Words to describe your personal qualities

Accurate	Active	Adaptable	Adventurous
Affable	Agreeable	Alert	Ambitious
Amicable	Analytical	Animated	Articulate
Artistic	Assertive	Attentive	Bold
Business-like	Calm	Capable	Caring
Cautious	Cheerful	Clear-sighted	Compassionate
Competent	Competitive	Concise	Confident
Congenial	Conscientious	Considerate	Consistent
Constructive	Conversant	Cooperative	Courageous
Creative	Curious	Daring	Decisive
Deliberate	Dependable	Determined	Diligent
Diplomatic	Disciplined	Discreet	Eager
Economical	Effective	Efficient	Encouraging
Energetic	Enterprising	Enthusiastic	Ethical
Exacting	Expert	Fabulous	Faithful
Farsighted	Firm	Flexible	Formal
Frank	Friendly	Generous	Gentle
Goal-orientated	Helpful	Honest	Humanistic
Humorous	Idealistic	Imaginative	Independent

Industrious	Informal	Ingenious	Innovative
Inquisitive	Insightful	Intelligent	Joyful
Keen	Kind	Knowledgeable	Likeable
Logical	Loyal	Mature	Methodical
Meticulous	Modest	Motivated	Natural
Neat	Non-judgmental	Nurturing	Objective
Obliging	Observant	Optimistic	Organised
Original	Patient	Perceptive	Persistent
Persuasive	Polite	Positive	Practical
Precise	Productive	Professional	Prudent
Punctual	Purposeful	Qualified	Quick
Rational	Realistic	Reasonable	Reflective
Relaxed	Reliable	Reserved	Resourceful
Responsible	Responsive	Self-assured	Self-confident
Self-controlled	Self-directed	Self-reliant	Self-starting
Self-sufficient	Sensible	Sensitive	Serious
Sincere	Skilful	Sociable	Stable
Strong	Successful	Sympathetic	Systematic
Tactful	Talented	Tenacious	Thorough
Thoughtful	Tough	Trainable	Trustworthy
Unassuming	Understanding	Unselfish	Useful
Valuable	Versatile	Vivacious	Warm
Well-groomed	Willing	Wise	Witty
Zestful			



### **Build your CV**

By now you should have all the information you need to start building your own CV. It is generally recommended, if you can, to create your CV as a Word document.

If you would like to use a template, try the CV builder on [www.myworldofwork.co.uk](http://www.myworldofwork.co.uk). It is easy to use and contains advice on what to enter section by section. You will need to register with the site to use it then you will be able to add details through your My World of Work account. Update your contact information, education or experience and they will appear automatically in any CV you create. You can save up to ten different versions on your account, and email or download them.

Note that templates can be a useful starting point for building an initial CV but need to be carefully customised to your own circumstances to work effectively.



### **Tip**

Do not under any circumstances simply attach your CV to an application form and refer the employer to that for the information. Employers will use the application form to judge how well you follow instructions. As mentioned above, employers have good reasons for using application forms; simply referring them to the CV is lazy and does not suggest you will be a conscientious employee.

# Application forms

**Some companies and organisations will ask you to fill in an application form rather than submit a CV. From both the applicant's and employer's point of view, application forms can have certain advantages. For example, all candidates will be submitting their information in the same format enabling the employer to make straightforward "like-for-like" comparisons, and recruiters won't be distracted or swayed by differing CV styles.**

Filling in an application form can be a daunting prospect: you need to provide a lot of information and they take time to complete. However, by doing so you are demonstrating to the employer that you are a serious contender for the job.

By using specially designed application forms asking specific questions, employers know that they are collecting information relevant to the post. All application forms will differ slightly but here we guide you through some general guidelines for completing the application form successfully.

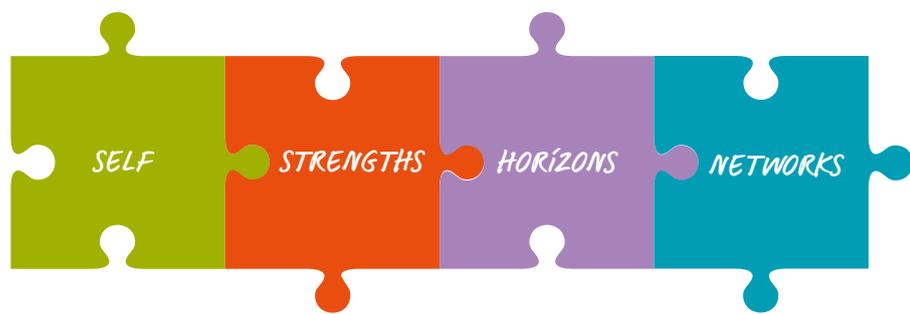
## **Basic guidelines**

**Planning** – If the form is online, draft your application offline first in a word processing package like Word and save it to your computer. This way you'll be able to run a spell check before you copy the information into the online system. It also means you'll have a back-up if there's a problem with the form. More and more sites offer the option of storing your application online and coming back to it. If you do this in more than one sitting, keep a record of any usernames and passwords so that you can get back in.

If you can only get hold of a hard copy of the application form, don't just go straight ahead and fill it in. Take a few photocopies first so that you can practice filling it in neatly and judge how much space is available. Check your answers for correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, completeness and accuracy. Keep a copy of the completed application form for future reference.

**Screening** – increasingly employers use Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) to screen applications submitted online for certain key skills, words and phrases. These can be found in the advert or selection criteria. Read the advert or job description carefully before you apply. Make sure that you reflect the language used and target your skills and experience to meet what the employer is looking for.

**Presentation** – read the instructions carefully and fill in all the appropriate sections. Write clearly and use a black ballpoint pen. Better still word process if possible. Most application forms are now available online which helps makes them look more professional.



### What do you need to fill in?

**Personal information** – include all the information asked for in the correct sections, normally your name, address, post code, telephone number and e-mail address.

**Employment history** – start with your most recent job and work backwards including as much detail as required so it is as complete and accurate as possible.

**Education, qualifications and training** – list academic, vocational and professional qualifications. Link the qualifications to the school, college, university or training provider that provided the learning or training. Do not underestimate in-house training courses and qualifications provided by a previous employer especially if they directly relate to the job you are applying for.

**Personal statement** - The 'Why you feel you are suitable for this position' part of the form is called your personal or supporting statement. It is the most important part of the application form. The employer will have seen which qualifications and work experience you have in the previous sections on the form. The purpose of this section is for you to show you're motivated to do the job and that you have carefully considered why you feel you would be good at it. Can you do the job, will you do the job, will you fit in?

Here is an example of what a Personal Statement might ask for:

### Information in support of your application

#### Skills, abilities and experience

Please use this section to demonstrate why you think you would be suitable for the post by reference to the job description and person specification (and by giving examples and case studies). Please include all relevant information, whether obtained through formal employment or voluntary/leisure activities. Attach and label any additional sheets used. See guidance sheet for further information.

#### Preparation for the Personal Statement

Before you start, make sure you have the following to refer to:

- the job description
- the person specification
- the application form
- your CV.

Begin by making a list of the important information you want to include such as titles of jobs, job duties, qualifications, personal qualities, skills, achievements. But remember don't simply repeat information you have given elsewhere in the application form.

#### Format of the Personal Statement

Although personal statements differ, it is generally the case that they follow a particular format. They should have an introduction followed by detailed supporting information and end with a clear conclusion.

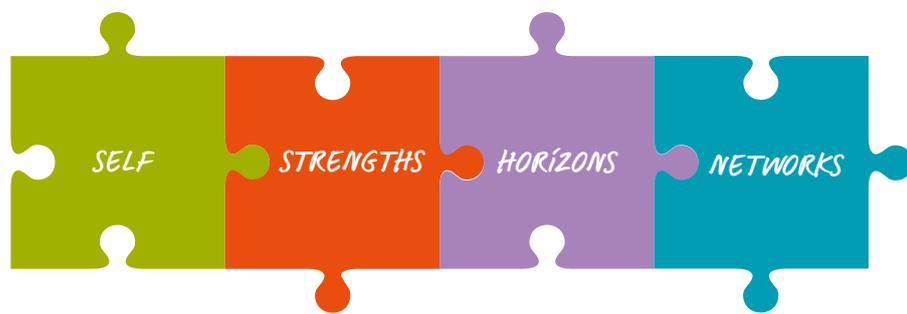
#### Things to consider

- applications can only be assessed on the information you provide. You need to clearly demonstrate your capabilities
- you need to explain how you meet each of the person specification points and provide examples from your previous experience. Do not forget to present this in relation to the job description

- often the strongest applications are those that link the three elements highlighted above and are presented in a clear format e.g. numbered points that correspond to person specification
- it is expected your supporting statement will be a minimum of  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a side of A4 and a maximum of 2 sides
- use concise, unambiguous sentences and avoid exaggerations
- honesty is always the best policy; do not make false claims
- if you are making a career change, stress what skills are transferable to the role you are applying for.

**Introduction:** You should begin with a strong opening that clearly demonstrates your suitability for the post and your reason for applying. You need to immediately gain the employer's attention and interest. Remember to connect your experience and skills to the post that you're applying for. Whichever way you structure your introduction, you should always mention the post that you are applying for in the first paragraph.

**Supporting information:** Subsequent paragraphs should refer to what you have achieved that demonstrates your relevant experience, skills, strengths and abilities. Try not to have one paragraph that has a few different messages: break this section into smaller paragraphs with each paragraph focussing on an individual key message that highlights your suitability for the job.



Remember to include examples to show previous experience and ability that are relevant to the post you are applying for.

**Conclusion:** Link together the various points you've raised in your statement and stress your enthusiasm for the post. You might also want to mention how this role would fit in with your long-term career development goals.

#### **Reviewing your draft Personal Statement**

While computer 'spelling/grammar checks' are helpful during revision – don't rely on them. You must read the draft thoroughly and, if possible, get someone else to check it over before you send it off.

**Competency based questions** - Some recruiters will have an application form made up of competency based questions. These ask the applicant to provide detailed answers based on personal experience to demonstrate your aptitude for the job.

An example might be: 'Think of a time when you were involved in a change to working practices. How did you influence colleagues to do something they were reluctant to do?'

Use the STAR model to answer this and other scenario/competency based questions:

- Situation – what was the situation?
- Task – what were you tasked to do?
- Action – what actions did you take personally to take the situation forward?
- Result – what was the outcome?

Often there will be a word limit attached to the answer. The employer is looking for a clear, succinct and disciplined answer. Avoid using the same scenario twice. Provide a spread of evidence in your answers, drawing on the breadth of your work, life and study.

Refer to Competency based Interviews in **Section 6: First impressions count** for more detailed advice.

**References** - Most employers will ask for references from two to three referees. At least one should be an employer or an academic referee. Current or most recent employers are preferable. Remember to provide names, addresses, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of referees as required. It is important that you speak to your referees beforehand to check that they are willing to give a reference.

#### **What can I do if my former employer only gives factual references?**

Your employer doesn't usually have any obligation to give you a work reference. Some employers will only provide a basic reference confirming facts like the length of time you worked for them and your job title.

A good reference will show your new employer that you have the right skills and qualities to do the job. A response that you worked there for two years and three months doesn't really help with that.

With factual references becoming far more common, your new employer might be satisfied with a simple response but if they're not, here are a few things you could try:

#### **1. Ask someone you knew well at the company**

If you've made a good impression on your manager, they may be willing to provide a more in-depth reference. It may be a case of contacting them directly rather than going through your HR department. It's worth asking. You can also think beyond your own manager. Are there other people you worked with who hold senior positions? Would they be willing to speak for you? What about colleagues you have worked with on particular projects?

### 2. Ask someone who's left the company

If someone senior has moved on but worked with you and knew you, you could ask them for a reference. They wouldn't be bound by the same HR rules. It just needs to be someone who can comment honestly on your work.

### 3. Ask a client or customer

Depending on the type of job you've done, you might have worked with clients or customers who could vouch for you. This would still give an impression of your attitude to work and the skills you can offer.

### 4. Ask someone outside work

Do you volunteer? Are you a member of a club or sports team? Do you help with a community group? Have you done work experience or an internship? Think about all the other people you know who could comment on your attitude, skills and experience. Consider what they would be able to tell an employer. Remember, if you're looking for a personal reference, don't ask a member of your family unless you have worked in a family business.

### 5. Ask someone in your industry

Are you a member of a professional body? If you're actively involved in your professional community, you may know someone there who can act as a reference.

### 6. Ask someone who's taught you

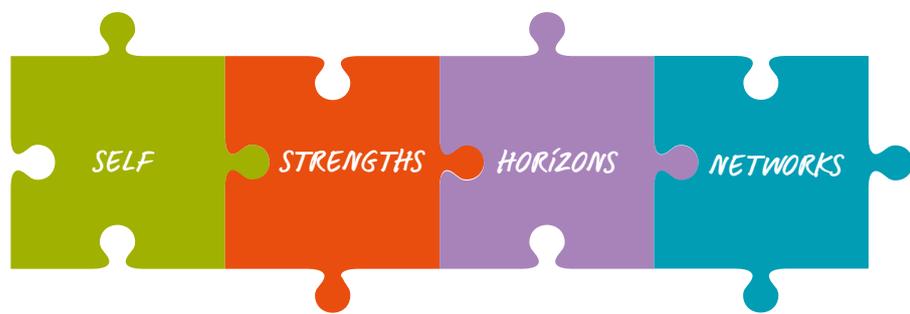
This one might depend on the last time you did some training. Think about school, college and university but also any on-the-job training you've done. Is there a teacher, lecturer or trainer who could provide a comment?

### Disclosing convictions

Some employers may require you to disclose previous convictions. In such cases most employers seeking disclosure will supply a separate envelope for you to submit any information regarding the disclosure of convictions. This is to ensure confidentiality.

## Sum it up

- research the company and the job
- read the form first and carefully follow all the instructions
- practise on photocopies, blank paper or a Word version
- tailor the application to highlight skills, strengths, experience, achievements and qualification relevant to the job
- answer all the questions or write 'Not Applicable' if that is appropriate
- don't tell lies. You could lose your job if found out
- keep it tidy and check you have no spelling or grammatical errors
- do not forget to sign and date the application
- get someone to check over the form before you send it
- keep a copy of your completed application for future reference and do not forget to review it before your interview
- enclose a covering letter with the form
- don't miss the deadline!



## Covering letters

**Covering letters are a way of introducing yourself to a potential employer. Remember a covering letter is the first impression the employer will get of you and may determine whether they read your CV or application form. It is an important but often overlooked part of the application process: a covering letter helps you stand out from the crowd.**

Sending a covering letter with your CV or completed application form gives you an extra chance to highlight relevant points and to expand on skills and experience. It also gives you the opportunity to provide the employer with additional information which would be difficult to fit into a CV or application form e.g. information on recruitment incentives.

Be sure to include where and when you saw the job advertised and quote any reference number provided.

A covering letter can also be used to accompany a CV when you are making a speculative application i.e. when you write to a company asking them to consider you for any vacancies which might exist or arise in the future.

It is less likely that a covering letter will be sent as a hard copy to accompany a CV by post; most are sent online or by email. However, your letter should follow traditional letter writing etiquette even if you are attaching it to an email.

**We have included an example of the format and content of a covering letter on the following page.**

Address  
Email  
Phone number  
  
Date

Name  
Job title  
Company name  
Company address

Dear Name

Job title/Reference number (if available)

**Paragraph one**

What is the purpose of the letter?  
Why are you writing it?  
What position are you applying for?  
Where did you find out about the role?

**Paragraph two**

Why are you a suitable candidate for this position?  
Why should the employer choose you?  
Use any job information and match this to your skills, achievements and experience to show that you have exactly what is required for the post.

**Paragraph three**

What is your motivation to apply?  
Why do you want this job?  
Why you are interested in this company?

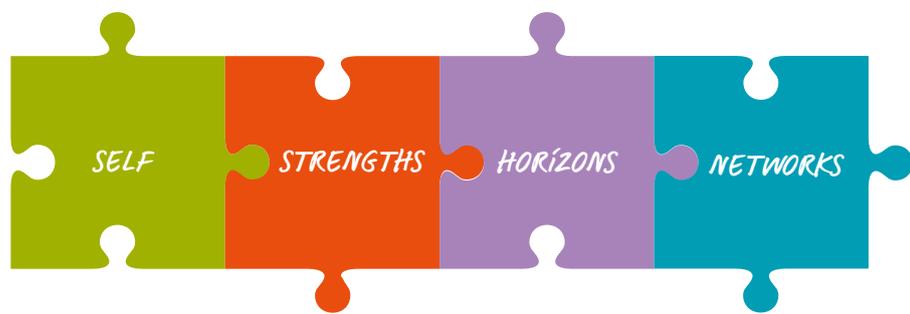
**Paragraph four**

Mention any additional information you are including with the letter such as an application form or CV.  
What do you want to happen next? End with a call to action by you or the employer.  
Thank the employer for taking the time to read the letter.

Yours sincerely,

*Your signature*

Your name



## Tips

Address the letter to a specific person - this information may be in the job advertisement or pack. If in doubt, contact the company to find out. This is especially important for speculative applications as it means the letter will be read by the right person. A letter addressed to a named person should end "Yours sincerely".

If you really can't find the name then begin the letter with "Dear Sir or Madam". It should then end "Yours faithfully".

Some letters may form the body of an email (with a CV attached) in which case the format may differ slightly. An email covering letter may follow a similar layout but without the need for addresses.

Alternatively, for online applications there may be an option to include a supporting statement, maybe in the form of a free text box – take the opportunity to fill this in.

## Sum it up

- keep your letter short – one side of A4 is enough.
- do not hand write a letter unless specifically asked to do so. Use the same font as your CV
- tailor it specifically to the job you are applying for
- use uncomplicated language
- always proof read, or get someone else to do it for you, to check for spelling and grammatical mistakes.

**This is the end of the section 'Get noticed'. If you still feel you are uncertain how to complete an application form or create a winning CV and covering letters, you may find it useful to review this section or get in touch to discuss things further.**



## SECTION 6

### **First impressions count**

How to prepare for common selection methods, including interviews and tests, and how to deal with what happens next.

# Interviews

## Why do employers want to interview applicants?

If you have reached the interview stage then you have attracted the attention of the employer and they want to find out more about you. Now you should prepare for the interview so that you can sell yourself well in a face-to-face situation.

People ask why they must be put through the ordeal of an interview. Employers use interviews to select applicants to:

- understand more about your ability to do the job
- find out why you want the job
- gain an impression of your personality
- verify points from your application form/ CV
- check if you will fit in well with the existing team
- ensure you are aware of the job and what it requires
- find out if you have researched the company
- give you the chance to ask questions about aspects of the job that you are not sure about
- find out how well you communicate face-to-face.

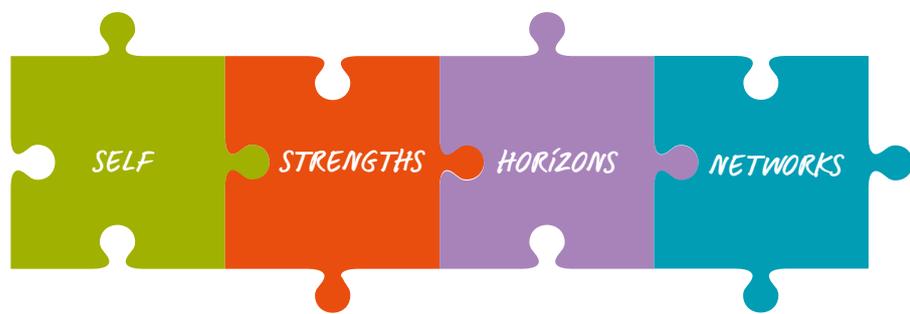
Remember the interview is a two-pronged tool. You can use it to help you to decide if you want to work for the company.

## Preparing for successful interviews

Preparation prior to an interview is vital for success. It is important to note that proper preparation is one of the best things for instilling self-confidence, reducing nerves and ensuring a good result. By planning well and preparing effectively you will perform at your best at interview.

### Prior to interview

- research the company
- identify your own skills, strengths and achievements, and match them to those required for the job
- know what type of interview you will be facing
- think of questions that you may be asked
- rehearse answers to the questions you may be asked
- prepare questions you would like to ask
- practise interviews to improve your technique
- make sure you know the route to the interview.



### Research the company

It is very important to prepare for the interview by finding out as much as you can about the company and the job you are being interviewed for. There are several ways of doing this including:

- check the company's website
- find them on social media
- look for news about the industry online, in newspapers or trade publications
- talk to people who already work there - see networking and informational interviews in **Section 4: Get Sorted**.

### What can you find out about the company?

- what products or services do they provide?
- who are their customers?
- who are their competitors?
- what is their reputation? Use a website such as **glassdoor.co.uk** to find out what a company is like from people who've worked there
- the size and structure of the company.

### Know about the job

It is important to know the skills and experience required for the job you are being interviewed for as well as information about the company itself.

What you have said about yourself has obviously made an impression and you have been invited for interview. Therefore, you should now consider the following questions. Reading over your CV or application form, the job description and the job advert as well as thinking about what you know about the organisation can help you obtain answers:

- why have you been invited along for the interview?
- what makes you the ideal candidate for the job?
- what are your unique selling points?
- what are your achievements?
- what are your motives for applying?
- what is your potential contribution to the position?
- what can you do to add to the success of the company?

### **Travel to the interview**

Make sure you know where and when the interview is taking place and how you will get there. Check that you know how long the journey takes and give yourself plenty of time in case of delays. Research alternative transport arrangements in case of unforeseen circumstances e.g. train cancellations.

To ensure you know exactly where you are going and how long it will take, do a trial run. Doing this may help settle your nerves on the day, as travelling to the interview can often be as stressful as the interview itself. Prepare for the journey beforehand and you will arrive cool, calm and collected on the day.

### **Dress code**

Decide in advance what you are going to wear. It is important to be smart but comfortable. It is acceptable to wear colour in your outfit but make sure that there is nothing to distract the interviewer e.g. strong perfume/ aftershave or excessive jewellery.

### **Stress busters**

Many people suffer from interview nerves. Nerves cause perspiration, fear, tension, rapid speech, a dry throat, forgetfulness and mental blocks. There are various ways to reduce nerves prior to the interview.

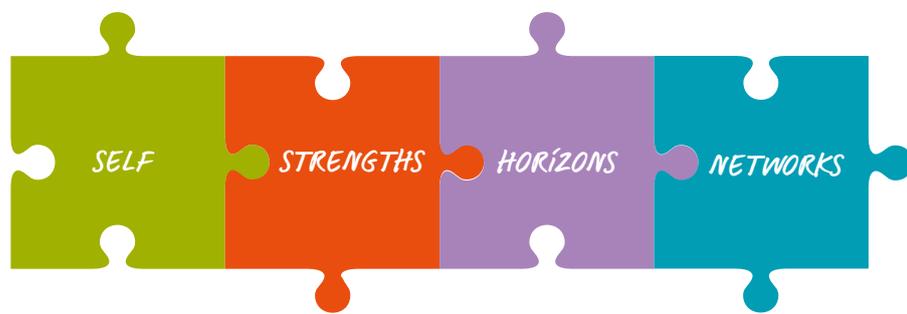
#### **1. Breathing exercises**

These can help to reduce your pulse rate and calm you down which will help you deal with the interview situation more easily. Here is a simple breathing relaxation exercise:

Firstly, sit comfortably in a chair with your feet resting on the ground. Count in your mind, letting each count last about a second. To relax deeply you need to breathe deep down into your stomach, so during this exercise rest your hand on your belly button. Take in a slow deep breath to push your hand out with your stomach and then breathe out slowly allowing your shoulders, face and body to relax. Do this to a count of four.

Breathe like this for five more breaths, focusing on your hand and stomach as they rise and fall, relaxing more with each breath. As you continue doing this the muscle in your stomach called the diaphragm will begin to send messages to your brain that you are safe and can relax. Next, say the word calm out loud. Now say it more quietly. Now say it inside your head quietly, gently repeating it over and over like it was the sound of a bell ...calm, calm, calm.

Now take in a normal breath and hold your breath to a count of five - one, two, three, four, five. And now breathe out slowly relaxing your shoulders, face and body. Breathe in slowly, pushing your hand out with your stomach. Breathe out slowly, allowing your hand and stomach to rest back down to a count of 5. Continue breathing like this for 5 more breaths, focusing on your hand and stomach as they rise and fall, relaxing more with each breath.



As you breathe in notice the stretching sensation and as you breathe out notice the relaxation that follows. Every time you breathe out you will feel calmer and more relaxed. You need only do this for a couple of minutes for it to start relaxing your mind. Once you have the hang of the stomach movement you won't need to rest your hand on your stomach although if you are lying down it's a pleasant thing to do.

Practice this exercise regularly prior to the interview and each time the relaxation will become a little deeper and it will become automatic so you can use it easily any time you feel anxious. It's also great to do it in bed at night to help you sleep.

## 2. Facial exercises

These will help you feel and look relaxed. There are simple facial exercises you can do to help. The benefits include increased circulation and relaxed facial muscles which relieve stress and tension. Try the "clenched smile" exercise:

Grit your teeth and open your lips as wide as they will go. Feel your lips, cheeks, chin and neck stretch to their limit. Hold for five seconds and release. Repeat.

## 3. Visualisation

What does a successful interview feel like or look like for you? For many people, this will be entering the room confidently, greeting your interviewers in an assured manner, answering the questions comprehensively, feeling comfortable with the situation. The planning and preparation you do before the interview will contribute to your success. Some people find visualisation techniques can also reduce stress and boost confidence.

Visualisation involves using the imagination to go to a relaxing place. There is no single correct way to use visual imagery but you may find something like the following helpful:

- find a private calm space and make yourself comfortable
- take a few slow and deep breaths to centre your attention and calm yourself
- close your eyes and imagine yourself in a beautiful location, where everything is as you would ideally have it, perhaps a beach, a forest or your favourite chair
- imagine yourself becoming calm and relaxed. Alternatively, imagine yourself smiling, feeling happy and having a good time
- focus on the different sensory attributes present in your scene to make it more vivid in your mind. For instance, if you are imagining the beach, spend some time vividly imagining the warmth of the sun on your skin, the smell of the ocean, seaweed and salt spray, and the sound of the waves, wind and seagulls. The more you can invoke your senses, the more vivid the entire image will become
- remain within your scene, touring its various sensory aspects for five to ten minutes or until you feel relaxed
- while relaxed, assure yourself that you can return to this place whenever you want or need to relax
- open your eyes again and re-join the world.

Once you are skilled in the technique, you can introduce these calm feelings as you visualise yourself at interview.

#### 4. Affirmations

One of the ways you can prepare for anything, including an interview, is to use positive affirmations. Positive affirmations are specific statements that you repetitively say to yourself to help you focus and banish negative thoughts in the process.

Positive affirmations are spoken in the present tense, for example, "I am successful" not "I will be successful" because that suggests that you're not currently successful. Repetition is the mother of learning, and that especially goes for the brain, the more you repeat your positive affirmations, the more the brain believes nothing else.

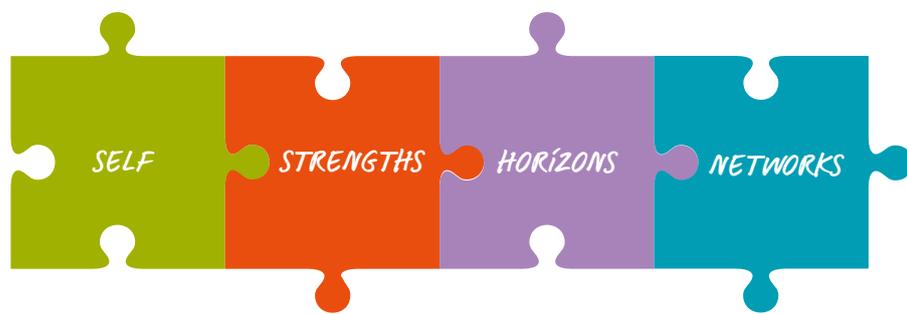
Here are three positive affirmations you can use to help you succeed at interview:

**"I am perfect for this position; I am the ideal candidate."**

**"I enjoy job interviews; I am calm and confident."**

**"I impress interviewers; I am head and shoulders above the rest."**

Get into the habit of repeating your positive affirmation or affirmations every day.



# Interview techniques

**A common worry is that, with so many possible questions, how can you effectively prepare? Although the questions may vary, there are three main areas that are almost always covered in any interview. Nearly all interview questions can be recognised in terms of these three key areas:**

## **1. Can you do the job?**

Showing you have the skills, strengths, qualifications and experience that allow you to do the job well.

## **2. Will you do the job?**

Being able to demonstrate that you are motivated by what the job and employer offers to commit to what is asked of you at work.

## **3. Will you fit in?**

Having the personality, qualities and interpersonal abilities that allow you work well as part of an established team.

For example, “Tell me about yourself” is an ideal opportunity to impress in all three areas. Unless the interviewer is only making small talk to relax you at the start of the interview, do not start talking about your life history or family. Instead, you should explain how and why you will do the job and how you would fit in.

Do not underestimate the value of “Will you do the job?” and “Will you fit in?” since the best qualified candidate who may appear unmotivated will lose out to a less qualified, trainable candidate.

## **Preparing answers for interview questions**

It is only by asking questions that the employer will be able to find out if you are a suitable candidate for the job. They will be looking for evidence you have the skills, qualities, experience and attitude that they are looking for. How you answer the questions is therefore very important.

A way to prepare yourself for this is to try to work out answers to the most commonly asked questions. Preparing responses to possible questions will help you when it comes to the interview itself. Consider what is unique about you and why the employer should choose you over the other candidates. You can use the STAR model to help you with your answers – there is more detail on this later in this section.

Before working out your answers, do the following:

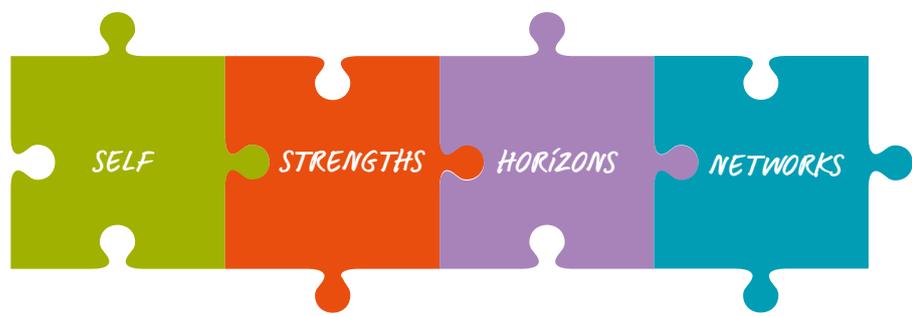
- re-read your CV/application form
- re-read any information connected with the job position i.e. job description, job advertisement
- make a list of things (skills, experience, measurable achievements, qualifications etc) the employer is looking for
- work out what your main strengths are (refer to previous sections of this book to help you if you are unsure)
- write down the main points you would like to get across at the interview.

### **My Interview**

This feature on [myworldofwork.co.uk](https://myworldofwork.co.uk) will help you prepare and understand what to expect when you go for an interview. My Interview goes through a number of questions and you select the answers you think are the most impressive. There is a mix of questions which as you go through will help you build your confidence and develop your interview skills. There is also advice on how to handle interview nerves and mistakes to avoid.

### **Thinking on your feet**

Although you should aim to be prepared for most of the questions, there may be some which require you to think on your feet. Actively listening to the interviewer will help ensure you give the best possible answer rather than providing a practised, but wrong, answer.



# Interview questions

Always remember to promote your skills, strengths, experience, achievements, knowledge and personal qualities when answering questions at an interview. Below are some examples of questions you may be asked. This list is not exhaustive so try to anticipate other questions and formulate answers to them too.



## Task

These sample questions include suggestions about what the employer might be looking for and space to write your own answers.

### Tell me about yourself

Do not mention everything you have ever done. Focus on the skills, experience and achievements relevant to the job you are applying for. Can you do the job, will you do the job, will you fit in?

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### What do you know about this organisation?

Demonstrate your in-depth knowledge of the company by talking about what you have learned from the research you have done e.g. the products or services they provide and to whom.

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**Why do you want the job?**

This is your chance to show you have researched the company thoroughly by linking your motivations to work with what you know about the company's ethos, what they do and the type of work you are likely to be carrying out. You can also mention here what you like about the company.

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**Why are you the best person for the job?**

This is an opportunity to let the interviewer know that you are a match for the role in terms of your skills, qualities, achievements and qualifications. This is your chance to convince the employer you are the ideal candidate. Make sure you have read the job description as this includes details of what the employer is looking for in an employee. Talk about the benefits you can bring to the job by giving examples of measurable achievements.

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**What are your strengths?**

This is a chance for you to shine. Before the interview, take the Strengths questionnaire on [myworldofwork.co.uk](http://myworldofwork.co.uk), list your strengths and think of a work-related example for each.

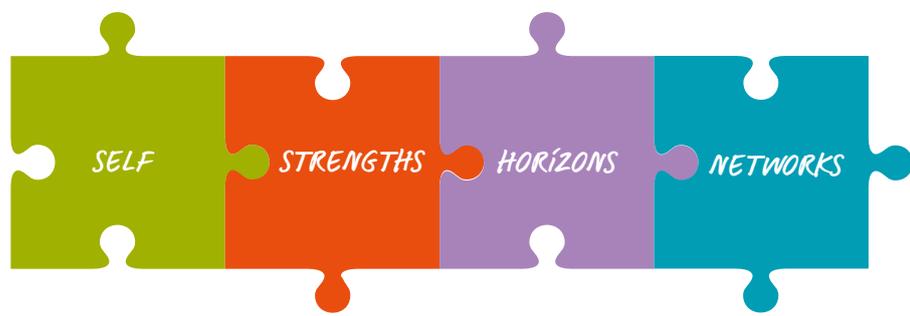
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**What are your weaknesses?**

Do not mention any real weaknesses as no-one will employ a person who can rhyme off a list of faults. It is best to talk about a weakness that you have since overcome as this shows that you are willing to develop yourself.

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**Why did you leave your last position?**

Be positive in your answer. For example, you might say “to take up a more challenging position” or “to develop my career.” Do not complain about your previous boss or company as this gives the impression you did not fit in. Do not say you left to get a job with more money as the interviewer will feel you may do the same thing to his/ her organisation. Be honest but brief.

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**What have you been doing since you left your last job?**

If you are unemployed, the interviewer will want to see that you have been constructively filling your time. Mention any training courses or voluntary work you have been doing and be prepared to give details that relate to the job role applied for.

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**What has been your greatest achievement?**

Your answer should cover some of the main qualities required by the job you are applying for. For example, if the job requires good selling skills you might talk about a big order you helped secure. If it involves organisational skills you might, for example, point to your part in the smooth installation of a new computer system. Refer to **Section 2: What have I got to offer?** to remind yourself of your achievements.

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**Can you tell me about a problem at work you've dealt with?**

The interviewer wants to assess your approach to problem solving and find out how you worked through an issue to a satisfactory conclusion for all involved. It is often easier to talk about a problem with a process rather than a person and how the way you dealt with it resulted in a positive outcome.

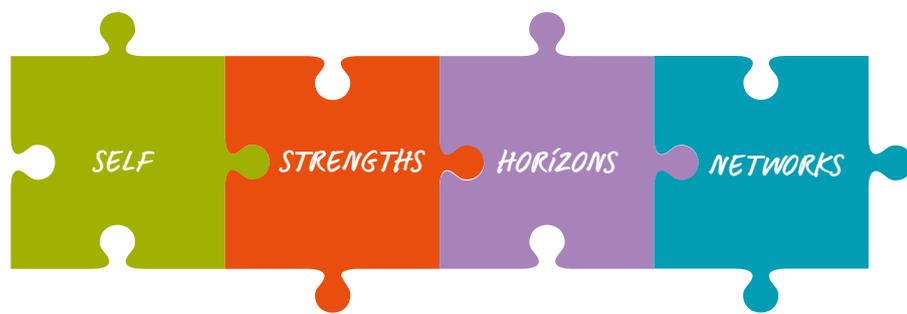
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## Types of interview

**How do you know what type of interview you will be attending? A good employer should tell you in the invitation to interview. However, if they don't it is perfectly acceptable to phone or email to find out. It is also helpful if you can find out the names and job titles of those interviewing you as this is one less thing to remember on the day and when following up.**

There are different interview formats you should be aware of:

### One-to-one

This is when it is just you and the interviewer together. This can be less nerve wracking because there is only one person for you to concentrate on and fewer people to impress. However, that person's opinion of you will determine the outcome of the interview. It can therefore be a less reliable method of selecting a candidate.

### Panel interviews

These can be good because views on you are spread across more people. If one interviewer doesn't like you, their views may be outweighed by others. However, this type of interview can be very demanding for you as you need to try and keep the attention of all on the panel.

It is worth mentioning that some companies will also ask for a short presentation which they will let you know about beforehand (see information on presentations in this section).

### Interviews by telephone

Increasing numbers of companies are using the telephone in the first stage of the interviewing process. Telephone interviews are done in several ways:

**Fully automated:** you may receive a letter giving a freephone telephone number to ring. You hear a list of statements/ questions and press a number on the telephone keypad to indicate your response.

**Structured:** a mutually convenient time is fixed in advance for the interview. You're taken through a series of questions that are recorded and analysed by trained interviewers. The questions are designed to establish if you have the required skills for the job.

**Screening:** you're questioned on various aspects of your CV to decide whether you'll be invited to a personal interview.

**A sales exercise:** you're given the opportunity to sell a product over the phone. This technique is used for recruiting sales, marketing or telesales staff.

The advice that follows about interviews later in this section applies just as much to telephone interviews, but some things are especially important:

- ensure your voice is clear and confident
- think about how the tone and pitch of your voice can help you sound motivated and interested
- smile when you're talking on the telephone, as you would when talking to someone face to face: the smile won't be seen but it can be heard
- standing up when talking can make you sound more confident.

### Competency based interviews

This type of interview is popular with companies, organisations and recruiters.

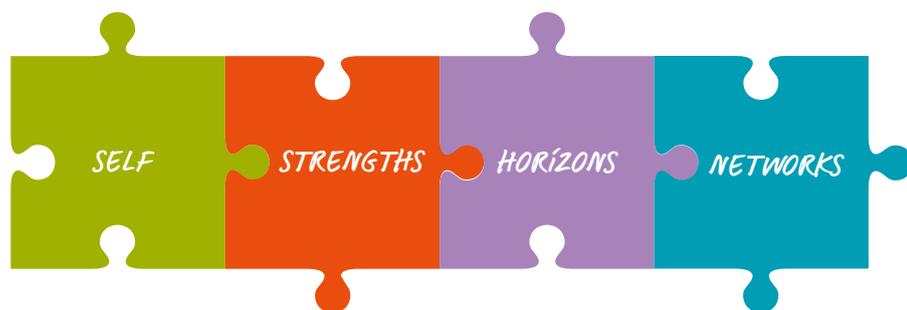
Competency based interviewing is based on the belief that past behaviour is the best predictor of future performance. The interviewer will be seeking information about your past behaviour in certain situations.

These interviews are structured with questions that relate directly to specific skills and competencies that are required for the post you are applying for. All candidates are asked the same questions and notes are taken during the interview to evaluate each candidate's suitability.

The interviewers will base their questions on the specific needs of the post being applied for, utilising the competencies that have been identified by their company.

### Example of how a company's competency framework might look

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Performance indicators</b>
<b>Individual</b>	<b>Your personal attributes</b>
Influencing	Getting other people to take on board your ideas.
Personal development	Willingness to continuously develop your knowledge and skills.
Decision making	Ability to judge situations, make decisions and take responsibility for the decisions you make.
<b>Managerial</b>	<b>Your ability to manage staff and situations</b>
Leadership	Playing a leading role to ensure the future success of your company.
Project management	Managing projects; setting and meeting targets, objectives and priorities.
Collaboration	Working together with colleagues and partners, within and outside the company, to meet customers' needs.
Forward planning	Anticipating future needs, taking appropriate action and being prepared for contingencies.
<b>Motivational</b>	<b>The things that drive you and the qualities you need to succeed</b>
Attitude	Responding positively to change with a solution focussed approach.
Motivation	Being focussed and driven to succeed.
Initiative	Always looking for better ways to deliver results and improve performance.
Flexibility	Open to new ideas and willing to change the way that you work if necessary.
Innovation	Looking for new ways to adapt products and services to meet customers' needs.
<b>Analytical</b>	<b>The ability to use logical reasoning</b>
Analytical skills	Ability to analyse situations and adopt measures that resolve problems and lead to improvements in services.
Attention to detail	Making sure that the work you do is thorough and accurate.
<b>Interpersonal</b>	<b>How you interact with others</b>
Communication	Ability to communicate in a clear and concise way so that others understand you.
Supporting others/ team work	Supporting and working in a collaborative way with other members of your team.
Open mindedness	Prepared to take on board other people's ideas and opinions.



These general themes are those that many organisations adapt when determining competencies that meet their own specific service requirements, including aims and objectives. Companies and organisations determine their key competencies and often rank them – Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3. These levels are determined by the responsibility and the nature of the duties of individual staff.

It is important to recognise that the answers you give should correspond to the level of the post that you are applying for. This involves demonstrating competencies at the relevant level. For instance, the level and the nature of the answer should correspond to level 3 for senior/medium level management posts, level 2 for supervisory/lower level management posts and level 1 for the remainder of staff.

### Scoring a competency based answer

Normally in a competency based interview the interviewers will measure how well you have answered each question (taking account of the level of the post you are applying for) and will allocate a score against each answer. These scores will be totalled and the candidates with the highest total score will generally be considered for the post.

Example of a scoring system

<b>4</b>	The candidate has shown a full awareness of the competencies required for the post and demonstrated that they have the right combination of skills, qualities, personality, qualifications and experience to match the requirements of the post.
<b>3</b>	The candidate has shown a good understanding of the competencies required for the post and demonstrated that they have many of the skills, qualities, personality, qualifications and experience required for the post.
<b>2</b>	The candidate has shown some understanding of the competencies required for the post and demonstrated that they have some of the skills, qualities, personality, qualifications and experience required for the post.
<b>1</b>	The candidate has little understanding of the competencies required for the post and has not demonstrated that they have the right combination of skills, qualities, personality and experience for the post.

### How to answer a competency based question: the STAR model

The interviewers will be looking for specific examples describing exactly what you did in certain situations. You can choose relevant examples from your current job, a previous job or a situation outside of work altogether. It is likely that the interviewers will then follow with some probing questions. They will be interested in the outcome of the situation and whether there was anything you learned from the experience.

The STAR model will provide a structure to your answers:

- Situation – describe a situation or problem that you have encountered.
- Task – describe the task that needed to be accomplished.
- Action – describe the action you took including obstacles that you had to overcome.
- Results – highlight outcomes achieved.



## Tips

**Situation** – Think of this section as ‘setting the scene’.

Provide the interviewer with a bit of background about the question, and give them some context. Try and be specific, and include names and dates wherever appropriate to help add credibility.

**Task** – Build on the background you’ve given, and outline the task at hand.

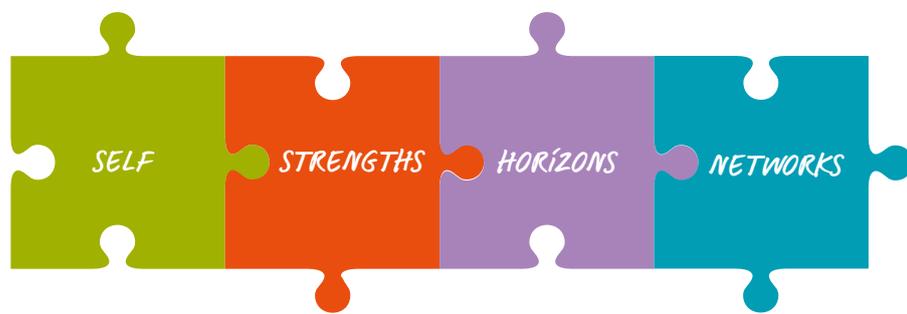
Specifically, how did the situation relate to you? And what were the major tasks you needed to undertake to resolve it? Include how important or difficult the situation was to overcome, as well as any constraints you came up against.

**Action** – What did you do to resolve the situation?

Outline the steps you took to ensure a successful outcome, without being tempted to take all the credit. The key to effectively incorporating the ‘action’ part of your answer is to identify what skills the interviewer really wants to see, and reinforce them throughout.

**Result** – What was the outcome of the situation?

Remember, everyone loves a happy ending, and recruiters are no different. This is your chance to shine by making your happy ending quantifiable.



As with general interview questions, it is worthwhile preparing answers to possible competency based questions. The good news is that normally companies will inform you of the competencies on which they will base their questions so you can have 2 or 3 examples prepared using the STAR Model for each competency.

### **Competency based interviews: STAR model response examples**

A candidate for an administrative assistant role is asked *"Tell me about a time when you used your initiative at work"*

**Situation:** *"I had been working in my current job for 6 months and had noticed that there were duplications in paperwork for purchase orders. I asked the office supervisor why we did it that way and she said she didn't know, it had always been like that. I asked my boss and some colleagues, and no one knew why but everyone agreed that it was very time consuming and took up a lot of space."*

**Task:** *"I looked at all the paperwork we used for purchase orders and considered the information we needed. I realised that we could gather, store and review all the information required by using one database rather than 3 document folders."*

**Action:** *"I then made up an Access database of all our suppliers as well as an Excel spreadsheet of all money spent set out in tabs month by month. I showed them to my supervisor and explained how this system worked: she said it was a very good idea and easy to use."*

*My supervisor showed my spreadsheet and database to the boss who thought it was a simple and effective system. I transferred all the purchase order paperwork for the previous financial year onto the database and spreadsheet. I also trained all staff in how to record the purchases and suppliers in the new system. In addition, I produced a flow chart explaining how to do this for easy reference should people need a quick reminder of the process."*

**Result:** *"Everyone agreed that my new system was more efficient and easier to use. The boss was pleased because he could access the monthly purchases easily on one sheet."*

A candidate for a customer services role is asked *"Describe a situation when you had to deliver excellent customer service following a complaint"*

**Situation:** *"A customer rang up complaining that they'd waited more than two weeks for a reply from our sales team regarding a product query."*

**Task:** *"I needed to address the client's immediate query and find out what went wrong in the normal process."*

**Action:** *"I apologised, got the details and passed them to our head salesperson, who contacted the client within the hour. I investigated why the query hadn't been answered. I discovered that it was a combination of a wrong mobile number and a generic email address that wasn't being checked. I let the client know and we offered a goodwill discount on her next order."*

**Result:** *"The client not only continued to order from us but posted a positive customer service tweet."*

Used at its best, the STAR structure is invisible to the listener and it simply comes across as a well-articulated example. Create a bank of answers in this format in advance so you don't struggle to do it on the day and can make it appear as seamless as possible.

Producing good, well formed answers using the STAR model takes practice and the next exercise will help get you started.



## Task

Consider the questions below and answer using the STAR model:

1. Tell me about a situation when you were under a great deal of pressure to achieve a goal.

**Situation:**

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**Task:**

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**Action:**

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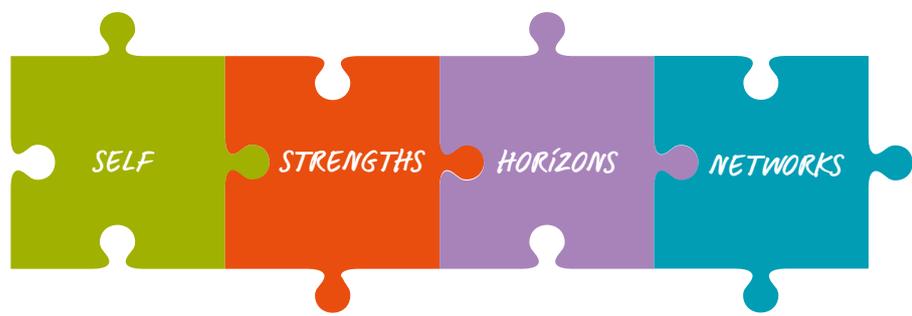
**Result:**

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**2. Tell me about a time when you identified a new or different approach to addressing a problem or task.**

**Situation:**

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**Task:**

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**Action:**

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**Result:**

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## Tip

### Make your answer even stronger with STARR

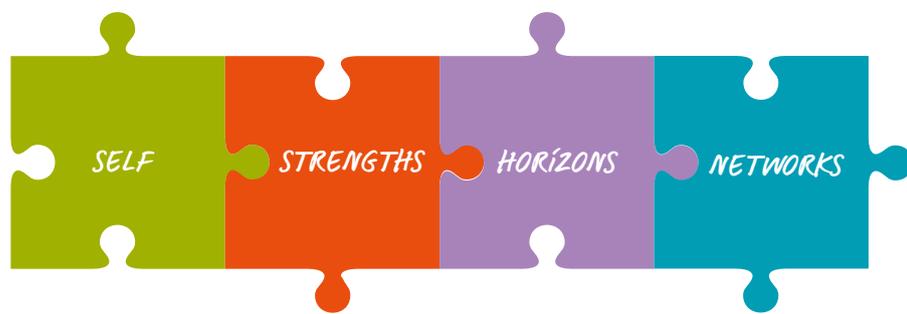
The extra R is for **Reflection**.

Think back on the action you took and the results achieved:

- What did you do well?
- What could you have done better?
- Would you have done anything differently?
- What did you learn?

You may not need to refer to this in your answer but it is worth being prepared to do so if asked by the interviewer. It demonstrates you are willing to consider new or different ways of doing things if it produces the desired result. It shows you are open to change and committed to improving yourself and your work.

Sometimes interviewers will ask about a situation where you were unsuccessful. This is an opportunity to express how well you learn lessons from failure but also reveal qualities such as resilience, determination, strength of character, flexibility and initiative.



## Presentations and other selection methods

**We have established that most employers use interviews as a selection tool but employers also use other selection methods, in addition to an individual interview, to assess a candidate more fully. These are described in detail below.**

### **Making presentations at interview**

You may be asked to deliver a presentation as part of the selection process. Here are some points to help you prepare.

**Topic:** If you are given a topic, it is likely to be something applicable to the job in question. If you choose your own topic, pick something relevant which has at least one key memorable message.

**Content and structure:** Note down all the points you wish to cover. List three or four key areas in a logical order with bullet points under each area. Cut out anything that is not absolutely necessary. You should have an introduction, explaining what the purpose of your presentation is, and a conclusion to summarise what you have said and to state what action if any, needs to take place. Plan the actual words for your opening, closing and link points.

**Notes:** Your own notes to use as prompts can be handwritten or typed. These should be clear and minimal. You can use colours to highlight the important points.

**Dealing with questions:** Remember to invite questions from the audience. Try to anticipate likely questions and plan your answers.

### **Visual aids/PowerPoint:**

- should either illustrate or summarise what you are saying
- make them straightforward and clear with text big enough to be read easily
- do not simply stand and read from them
- make sure you add relevant detail to the points listed in your speech
- have copies to hand out to your audience.

### **Style:**

- speak slowly and clearly
- use uncomplicated, direct language
- eye contact: look at the audience as much as possible
- use natural movement and hand gestures
- try to notice and avoid nervous habits like 'ums' and 'ers' or playing with hair or pens
- smile!

### **Practise:**

- run through the presentation several times to check the timing and to ensure that you don't have to rely on your notes
- if possible find an audience who can give constructive criticism
- if you know you are going to have to give a presentation but do not know what the topic will be, think about some obvious topics of relevance to the job. Then practise going through the process above.

If you are doing a presentation, make sure you have checked any equipment for the presentation is working. If it is to be supplied by the interviewer ask to have it checked beforehand. If you are using PowerPoint it is worthwhile having printed copies on hand should the technology fail.

# Assessment centres

**We look at this in more detail here to help you think about what to expect if you face this when applying for an opportunity. Although they may seem quite overwhelming, assessment centres can be much fairer to applicants and more reliable for employers than the usual straightforward interview because they give a broader picture of candidates' abilities.**

## Group sessions

This tends to involve a group of candidates (typically 6-10) undergoing a mix of tests and exercises. These can last from a few hours to several days. They do not follow the traditional question and answer interview format. Instead, candidates take part in problem-solving activities.

**Group activities:** These are used by an employer to see how you interact with others and how you contribute to the group reaching its objectives. You will be observed during the activity and assessed on several criteria. This might include:

- whether you take on a leadership role
- how good you are at influencing and persuading

- how well you work in a team setting
- the effectiveness of your communication style
- to check if you listen to and involve others
- how well you function under pressure.

Your reaction to the group leader can also be revealing – are you supportive, constructive, argumentative? If you are appointed leader the employer will want to find out if you can:

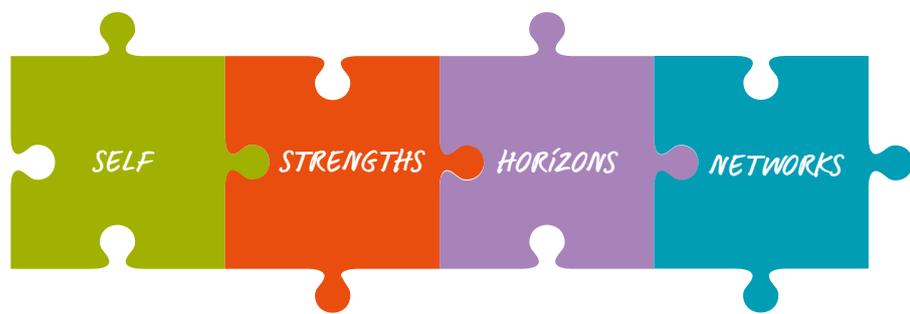
- plan and manage the task
- delegate job roles within the group
- involve the whole team including quieter group members
- take feedback and alter solutions in the light of new ideas
- listen and ask relevant questions
- give encouragement to the group.

**Role play:** Some companies use role-play scenarios to recreate an aspect of the job. For instance, one candidate might act as an angry customer while another plays a staff member trying to resolve the situation using a solution devised by the group.



## Tips

- express your opinion but don't try to dominate the discussion
- don't over-react to candidates who are aggressive or who make any personal remarks
- try to avoid getting into one-to-one conversations
- if you're not chosen to be leader just accept it and don't sabotage the leader's performance in protest
- if you are not a natural leader, that's ok. But you must be an active participant in any discussion or activity.



## Making presentations

Typically, at an assessment centre, preparation time will be allowed on the day. This can be a test of your communication skills, your performance under pressure, how you relate to a group and how well you present to an audience.

The PREP method can be helpful for putting together presentations at short notice. PREP stands for:

**Point** Introduce your main point. Focus on one point at a time, so it's easier for your audience to comprehend.

**Reasons** Tell the audience why you think the point is true. Back this up with research and statistics to add credibility.

**Example** Highlight an example (or several) that supports your main point and your reasons. Again, back this up with data if you can.

**Point** Wrap up by reiterating your main point so that it sticks in people's minds.

## Individual activities

**Case studies:** You may be asked to assess information to draw conclusions or answer questions. The information will generally be similar to the type of data you would need to deal with in the job. So, for instance, you might be given a report or various pieces of information and asked to make recommendations on what action to take.

**In-tray exercises:** As the name suggests candidates are presented with the sort of written information, requests, memos and so on that they would need to deal with in the job and asked to prioritise and plan appropriately.



## Tip

You can also use PREP at the "action" stage of the STAR model.

# Selection tests

**Employers use assessment centres and selection tests as a way of preselecting potential employees. Recruiting staff is a very costly exercise for businesses so more employers are using a combination of interviewing, assessment and testing in their recruitment process.**

Numerical, verbal, spatial awareness and personality tests can be completed individually on paper or computer. You will find lots of information on aptitude testing including links to practice tests on [myworldofwork.co.uk](http://myworldofwork.co.uk).

Selection tests may be taken:

- prior to an interview
- at an assessment centre
- after an interview.

You will generally receive some notification of this beforehand. At the end of the test, or once the results have been assessed, you should be given some feedback on how you have performed.

## Who uses selection tests?

Some employers give selection tests to all applicants, for example fire, ambulance, police and prison services. Others ask only selected candidates to sit tests.

Tests are more likely to be carried out by large employers where there are personnel departments with staff specially trained to administer them. Small employers sometimes test for a particular task, for example literacy, numeracy or spatial awareness. Personality tests may also be used.

Selection tests fall into three main groups:

### 1. Aptitude tests

These aim to predict how well you're likely to perform in a certain job or task by testing aptitudes needed for it. For example, a test

that looks at your aptitude for spatial awareness could indicate how well you might perform as an engineering technician where you would be dealing with diagrams and three-dimensional shapes. Other examples are tests that measure your aptitude for reasoning with words, numbers or diagrams, problem solving or following complex instructions. They could be keyboard, touch screen or 'pencil and paper' tests. They are mostly multiple choice which means you are given several possible answers to each question and choose the right one.

For some jobs (such as electronic assembly) you might be given a practical test to measure your manual dexterity (how you work with your hands).

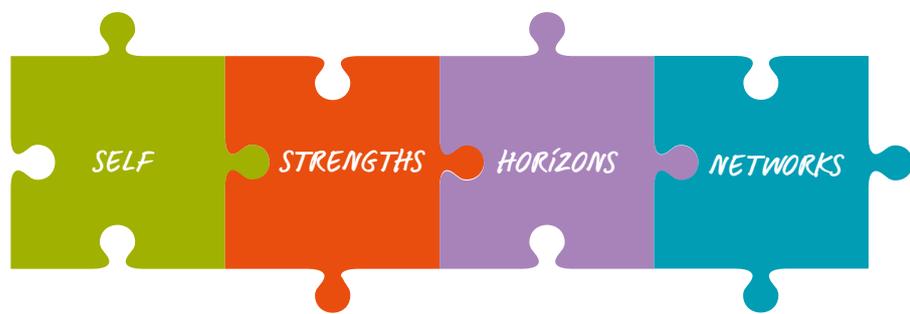
Aptitude tests are strictly timed and you would be working against the clock, often with very few minutes for each task. Few people get through all the questions so don't waste time over something that you can't answer.

### 2. Attainment tests

These tests aim to find out if you have the skills and knowledge for the job in question. For example, a word processing test measures keyboard skills, arithmetic tests measure your skill in dealing with figures.

### 3. Personality tests

These can look at factors such as your ability to deal with ambiguity or susceptibility to stress. They feature questions that ask about your thoughts, feelings and ways of behaving. For example, they measure whether you tend to be a leader or follower, introvert or extrovert, cautious or impulsive or perhaps look at how assertive you are. There are no right or wrong answers but the employer is likely to compare your profile with the specification for the job in question.



### Preparing for tests

Research has shown that practising for tests may lead to an improvement of several points. You won't continue to improve beyond a certain point but familiarity with types of test and getting used to working under tight timescales will help improve performance.

Some organisations send information about the test with the job application or interview pack. This may include sample tests. Otherwise, there are websites available, including [myworldofwork.co.uk](http://myworldofwork.co.uk), that give examples of the sort of questions you will find in tests. It is a good idea to work through some of these tests. Time yourself carefully to get an idea of what it will be like on the day.

Immediately prior to the test, you will be given clear instructions about what is expected and you are usually given the chance to try some practice questions.



## Tips

- listen carefully to the instructions
- ask if you do not understand what you have to do
- don't waste time puzzling over a question you cannot answer – move on and go back if you have time
- don't worry if you do not have time to finish the test but try to balance speed and accuracy for the best results.

# The final furlong

**“Do you have you any questions for me?”**

**A good sign! The interview is probably drawing to a close but don't relax too much!**

Although job interviews often feel like an interrogation, they're meant to be a conversation between you and a potential employer. Asking plenty of questions during a job interview can not only help you build a dialogue but can also help you evaluate if the job is right for you.

Questions can be as simple as asking about the next steps and when you may expect to hear back. However, it is better to ask about the duties, training and career development opportunities. Asking well thought out questions as part of the interview process is important for success and it is also part of the process where many candidates let themselves down. Many will say they have no questions as all their concerns have been covered, while others will ask questions that smack of “what's in it for me?” relating to pay, holidays, conditions etc.

Asking good questions can help you stand out from the crowd. It shows your interest and illustrates that you are the right fit. Asking well prepared questions is doubly important because of a psychological concept called primacy/recency.

## **Primacy/Recency**

Put simply, this means that if a lot of people are interviewed for the same job, the interviewer will tend to remember quite clearly what each candidate says at the start of the interview, and will also recall quite clearly what they state at the end of the interview, with the middle part of the process being less clear in the memory. Obviously, this means that it is very important to make a positive initial impression, although most people are very aware of this. However, it also means that it is useful to make a strong impression at the

end of the interview, and because questions are typically scheduled for the end, you do this by asking two or three well prepared and intelligent questions.

Writing down your questions beforehand and taking them to interview with you will demonstrate that you are well organised. Have at least three questions to ask the interviewer. For example, you might want to draw attention to something you have found out about the organisation as part of your preparation, and then ask for some more detail. Or you might ask about training that would be linked to the job which helps to demonstrate your interest in learning new things.

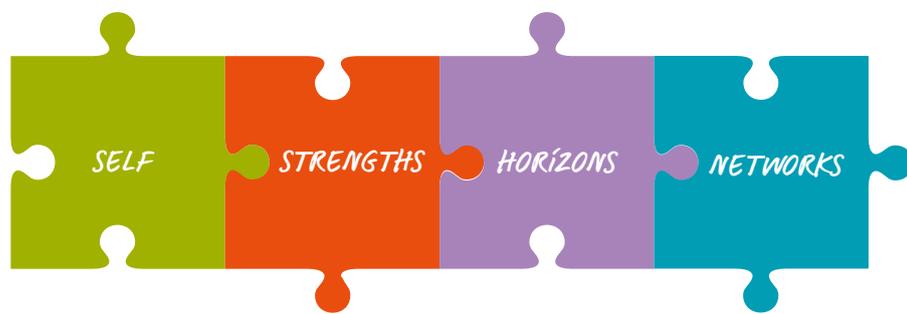
You can also use this opportunity to tell the interviewer anything about yourself that they have not raised during the interview but which you feel is important to your application. For example, “May I tell you a little more about my particular interest in communicating with clients/developing new ideas/implementing better systems?” is a way of getting permission to blow your own trumpet.

## **Examples of questions to ask in job interviews**

Be sure to consider the nature of the job and of the organisation when deciding which questions you would like to ask. This list is not exhaustive and you will be able to come up with questions of your own too:

### **What are the most enjoyable and the least enjoyable aspects of the role?**

This can show that you like to know what sort of challenge you are going to face and that you like to get properly prepared for it, all in the expectation of being able to rise to it.



**You mentioned there will be a lot of presenting/researching/liasing; what do your most successful people find satisfying about this part of the role?**

This question can serve two purposes; it demonstrates your listening skills and associates you with being successful in the role and finding it satisfying.

**What types of training opportunities do you offer?**

This is a common question – it highlights that you’re keen to advance your skills and add further value to the organisation.

**Is there scope for promotion in the future?**

This is another common question. In a similar vein, it emphasises a determination to make progress over the long term.

**Can you tell me how the role relates to the overall structure of the organisation?**

With this question, you’re drawing attention to a preference for teamwork. It looks as though you want to know where you would fit in and how your contribution would affect the rest of the company.

**In what way is performance measured and reviewed?**

This question flags up that you appreciate the importance of delivering real results. You will be seen as someone who understands the value of commitment, reliability and returns.

**What are the most important issues that you think your organisation will face? or You have recently introduced a new product/service/division/project; how will this benefit the organisation?**

These variations both show that you are interested in the job and the employer behind it too. It will be apparent you have done some research, done some thinking, and are now eager to hear their analysis.

**Do you think I have the right skills and experience for this position?**

This is a rather more brazen way of emphasising some of your strengths. It suggests you are open to constructive criticism and willing to learn from the experience of others. It also gives you a real chance to address any weaknesses the interviewee may think you have. Finally, it allows you to finish on a high, re-stating why you think you are the right person for the job.

You might also want to find out why the job has become vacant. Was there a reorganisation? Was your predecessor promoted?

If it does happen that, during the interview, all the points that you had noted down to ask about have been covered before you get to this stage you can respond as follows: “I’d made a note to ask about xxx, but we went over those earlier and I really feel you’ve covered everything that I need to know at this moment.”



## Tip

Don’t feel you must wait until the end to ask questions - if the chance to ask a question seems to arise naturally during the interview, take it! Remember that a traditional interview is a conversation - with a purpose. The interview is a two-way process. You are choosing the organisation as much as they are choosing you, so it is OK to ask questions as you go along.

# Hints and tips for the big day

## Body language

It is important at the interview to create the right impression and your body language can say a great deal about you. To convey a positive, confident picture to the employer:

- walk and sit with good posture
- shake hands firmly and briefly
- smile! This is the most positive signal you can give
- avoid fidgeting and keep your hands away from your face
- don't fold your arms
- maintain good eye contact with the person you're speaking to
- try to adopt an open, honest and confident attitude.

## Speech and its importance

- the way you talk – delivery, speed, tone and pauses – indicates what you feel about what you are saying. Try to speak in a clear steady voice. If you hesitate and stumble, or rush, you will appear nervous and ill prepared
- sound as if you have confidence in yourself
- speak clearly. Don't drop your voice towards the end of the sentences
- use plain language. Avoid jargon and slang
- speak concisely and judge when you've said enough. Observing the interviewer's behaviour will give you clues. The STAR model will have helped you frame your answer so it has a beginning, a middle and an end
- convey enthusiasm, warmth, friendliness and sincerity
- avoid negative statements.

## Listening

Avoid falling into potential traps at the interview such as:

- failure to listen to the questions
- answering questions that were not asked
- providing too much information or information not asked for.

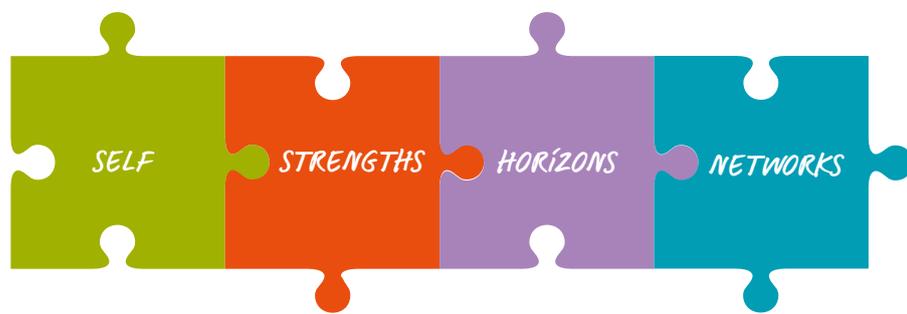
These blunders can reduce your chances of receiving a job offer.

## DO

- arrive in plenty of time
- dress appropriately
- switch off your mobile phone.

## DO NOT

- criticise others, especially previous employers or colleagues
- talk too much or pass on irrelevant information
- interrupt or argue
- press for an early decision. Instead, ask "When will I know your decision?"
- ask for an immediate evaluation for your interview performance – this will put the interviewer under pressure.



## After the interview

**Take a note of the questions and your answers:** If possible, do this as soon as you can after the interview has taken place as the information will be fresh in your mind. You can then refer to it later if need be, for example to review your performance or to check how you could improve your answers. This can help you determine the best way to approach future interviews.

**Write a thank you letter or email:** Stand out from other applicants by showing you are polite, courteous and have good written skills. Thank the employer for their time and highlight your key attributes.

A letter or email will help you be remembered by the employer when they come to make a decision about the candidates so send it as soon as possible after the interview. Even if you are unsuccessful this time it will show you in a good light should you apply to the same employer in the future.

### A second interview

This is an opportunity for recruiters to find out more about the candidates or to enable someone more senior to become involved in interviewing the shortlist of candidates. It is not going to be a repeat of the first interview.

**Why have a second round of interviews?**  
The employer wants to find out more about shortlisted candidates before making a final decision. It is likely that more time will be available so expect to be asked detailed/different questions about your past experience and be prepared with a list of your achievements.

Your job is to reassure the interviewer over any concerns: you are the right person for the job and you have the evidence to prove it.

### Unsuccessful?

#### What next? Keep going!

It is perfectly acceptable to request feedback about the interview. Not all employers will be prepared to give feedback or they may have a company policy not to; however, you have nothing to lose by asking and you might just get some feedback that you can use in future interviews. A telephone call or email is quick and informal. You may prefer to write a letter. You could say something like:

“I was disappointed not to be offered the position as I felt I had a good interview and I have the relevant experience and skills required for the job. Was there anything in particular that let me down?”

Feedback will help you identify what went wrong and you can then work to put things right. If you know you made mistakes at interview try to learn from these for your next interview. Use the notes you took about how you answered the questions to help you think about any improvements you could make. Don't feel you have to do this alone – ask for help if need be from a Careers Adviser or trusted friend.

Remember you did well to get an interview so you must have got the application right – keep going!

#### Remember:

- the key to your success is preparation
- it is necessary to plan and organise in order to succeed
- failing is easy – it requires no effort. Being successful in job search or in securing an opportunity involves hard work.

## **Been offered the job?**

### **Great! Now what?**

- do you want to take the job? Have you got enough information regarding pay and conditions etc to be able to make a proper assessment of the job? If not, contact the company and ask any required questions before writing your acceptance letter or email
- you may be made an offer via the telephone, in which case you could confirm there and then. You can ask for some time to think things over if need be
- if all is fine and you are keen to accept, write a short letter or email of acceptance stating the position you are accepting, when you will be starting (you should ensure you have taken into account the notice period requirements of your current post) and at what location
- if you decide to decline the offer, write a letter or email telling them that you do not wish to accept, and thank them for the offer (you may wish to apply to them in the future). Unless you wish to, you do not need to give reasons for non-acceptance
- once you have accepted an offer you need to inform your current employer, if you have one, that you are resigning from your post. Ideally, you should wait until you have an offer in writing from your new post even if you have accepted verbally
- you should inform your line manager, in writing, as soon as possible of your intention to leave. A simple resignation letter need only contain the date, the name of the person it is addressed to, notice of termination of employment, when this is effective from and, finally, your signature. If you wish to add any personal comment make sure it is positive.

**This is the end of the section 'First impressions count'. If you still feel you are uncertain how to prepare for and succeed at job interviews or other forms of selection process, you may find it useful to review this section or get in touch to discuss things further.**

[redundancyscotland.co.uk](http://redundancyscotland.co.uk)

Call Skills Development Scotland on  
**0800 917 8000**