



Strategic Recruitment Team

Essential Job Search Guide



Walsall Council



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Whether you're starting out on your career path or considering a job change you will undoubtedly need information to help plan your next move.

This Guide has been specifically designed to help you through the process of identifying your strengths and skills, likes and dislikes and decide on what you want from your next job. In addition there is practical advice and guidance on how to conduct your job search, tips for getting the most out of online jobs boards, how to prepare a CV/ complete job application forms and how to prepare for and be successful at interview and in assessment centres.

For those of you who have had your job seeking forced upon you, the Guide is useful in helping you to understand how such a major life change can affect your self-esteem and also the various stages you may go through before your emotions stabilise and your motivation to get things moving again increases.

Whatever your motivation for looking for a new job you will not want to miss out on this essential guide.

Lisa Koc, MREC, Cert RP
Principal Recruitment Consultant





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Mixed Emotions

If your job seeking is forced upon you, for instance if your job is being made redundant, you may experience mixed emotions. When a major part of your life changes it is quite common to experience a series of 'highs' and 'lows' that affect your self-esteem. It is useful to know that this is common in order to move through the following stages of your job search.



Denial

Denial is an automatic defensive reaction to the threat posed by a major change in our lives. At this stage we may not want to accept the reality of the situation, we may pretend that this is not really happening or may refuse to admit that we no longer have a job.

Emotional reaction

Emotional thoughts or feelings of anger or distress are indications of being at this stage. Sometimes the emotion may not be directed at the company but at an individual or can be recognised as general bitterness and irritability. Being 'depressed' or 'feeling low' or 'upset' are very common reactions.

Fantasy

At the fantasy stage we may feel that the decision will be reversed or that something will happen to save our job.

Coming to terms

This is when reality hits home. On the down side this will probably be the time when confidence and energy are at their lowest points. The up side is that once this stage is passed we can start to rebuild, take control and act more positively.

Growth

This phase is the start of a return to a more normal state. Emotions stabilise and motivation to get things moving again increases. At this point we take control of our future, grow in confidence and move towards actively getting a new job.





Identifying Skills and Strengths

Many people find it difficult, sometimes embarrassing, to identify their skills and strengths. It is sometimes easier to think about what we are not so good at rather than what we do very well. This is no time to be bashful! Try to remove all your negative thought barriers and concentrate on the positive attributes you have.

The following sections give examples of a number of skills and a number of strengths. Whilst it is obviously not a complete list it will give you a start when you begin to create your own list. Remember, when asked about skills and strengths people often relate these to their work life only. However, many strengths and skills are used in interests outside work.

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Skills

| | | | | | | |
|---------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Administering | Drawing | Operating | Analysing | Driving | Organising | Auditing |
| Estimating | Persuading | Budgeting | Evaluating | Planning | Building | Filing |
| Preparing | Calculating | Identifying | Presenting | Coaching | Implementing | Problem solving |
| Communicating | Innovating | Producing | Computing | Interpreting | Purchasing | Controlling |
| Interviewing | Questioning | Co-ordinating | Inventing | Repairing | Counselling | Keyboard skills |
| Researching | Creating | Leading | Selling | Decision making | Listening | Shorthand |
| Delegating | Managing | Supervising | Designing | Managing money | Supporting | Detecting |
| Marketing | Telephone skills | Developing others | Measuring | Training | Devising | Meeting skills |
| Typing | Diagnosing | Motivating | Visualising | Directing | Negotiating | Writing |

Strengths

| | | | | | | |
|------------------|-----------------|-------------|------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|
| Accurate | Even tempered | Persuasive | Adaptable | Fair | Positive | Ambitious |
| Flexible | Practical | Analytical | Forceful | Quick thinking | Assertive | Friendly |
| Realistic | Brave | Genuine | Reliable | Calm | Gregarious | Resourceful |
| Caring | Sense of humour | Responsible | Cheerful | Honest | Scientific | Competitive |
| Independent | Self-reliant | Confident | Innovative | Sensible | Conscientious | Inventive |
| Sensitive | Considerate | Imaginative | Sincere | Creative | Knowledgeable | Supportive |
| Customer focused | Logical | Systematic | Decisive | Loyal | Tactful | Dedicated |
| Modest | Thoughtful | Dependable | Motivator | Tidy | | |



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Creating options

For many of us the hardest part of changing jobs is deciding which job to go for next. You may want a complete change or look at other jobs with similarities to your current role. If this is true for you, one of the best ways to tackle this is to work through the following.

- Think about your skills, strengths and achievements. Which occupations use the qualities you have identified?
- List the things you like doing and those you would rather avoid.
- Think through the things you want from work.
- Consider different ways of working.
- List your restrictions.
- Map out all of your options.
- Research your preferred options.
- Choose your way forward.

Try not to think too much, at this stage, about a particular job title. Experience shows that this may restrict you and could lead to you overlooking a great opportunity. Your best bet is to let this emerge from the exercises that follow.





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Likes and dislikes

If you are not sure what you would like to do next, it may be useful to try the following exercise. List here the jobs you have held so far and complete the grid.



| The job | What I liked best | What I liked least |
|--|---|--|
| Example Customer service assistant | The people I worked with, Going on courses, Solving problems, Variety of work | Difficult customers, Working on Saturdays, Long hours, Wearing a uniform |
| | | |



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In my life

Spend some time thinking about the future and how you would like it to look. To do this you should relax and allow your mind to wander. Put aside all practical considerations for the moment.

Describe or draw a picture to illustrate how you would like your life to be...



| ... in 3 years time | ... in 10 years time |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| | |

Now think of three key words that describe the pictures:

| | |
|--|--|
| | |
| | |
| | |



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From my next job

List down the things you want from your next job and those you need. Your list of wants will probably exceed your needs. Another way of looking at this is to think about the things you wish to avoid or have less of next time.



| Needs | Wants |
|--|---|
| <p>Example £xx,xxx per annum Within 1 hour travel</p> | <p>£xx,xxx per annum 20 minutes travel Less responsibility More teamwork</p> |
| | |



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Creating options

To create and think through some of your career options use the planner below. On it you can map out all the potential directions you may want to take and then evaluate each one.

The career planner has four boxes for you to place your options in:

For each of the options you have mapped out ask yourself the following questions:

Why do I want to do this?

What additional skills do I need?

What are the risks?

Financial

Upheaval

Probability of success

How will any new organisation be different?

How long will it take to prepare and train for the new role?

What assistance is available?

What do I need to do to make it happen?

How long will it take to find the right position?

Who can help me?

Where will I find these opportunities?

| | | |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Skills | Different job Similar organisation | Different job Different organisation |
| | Similar job Similar organisation | Similar job Different organisation |
| Current job | Type of organisation | |



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Preferred options

Once you have assessed your options, note them below and begin to research your choice using the guidelines.

Option 1

Option 2

Option 3



Research

- Who can I talk to about this?
- Where can I read about these occupations?
- Which organisations use these types of people?
- How do people find these jobs?
- When do organisations recruit these people?
- Who can I write to for more information?



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Networking

Many studies about job searching suggest that networking is the number one way people find new jobs. When looking for a new job remember one of the most important resources you have – people you already know. If they knew you were looking for a new job, would they be able to help you? Putting in a simple phone call or sending an email to people you know could help you uncover some valuable job leads.

Combining networking and job search

When you are meeting people who can help you in your career, perhaps at an event or in a meeting, keep in mind these basic principles:-

- Always look your best – you are marketing yourself so you want to look professional and as smart as possible
- Don't come across as desperate – think about the different ways prestige cars are sold, no hard sell and often no price tag, just check out how good the car looks and how well it performs.



Staying in touch

One of the most effective ways to build a strong network of contacts is to stay in touch with existing contacts. This takes a continual effort of coming up with reasons to get in touch. People appreciate it if you remember their birthday, anniversary, something that's important or interesting to them.

Why not start right now? Go through your address book and find reasons to get in touch with 10 people you haven't been in touch with for a while. Showing genuine interest and being open to helping them will make it more likely that they will be open to helping you at some point when you need it.

Every one of your contacts increases your networking potential. If you estimate that everyone has an average of 200 contacts, you could have access to up to 40,000 people through your network if your relationships are maintained well!

Contacting employers directly

If there are specific companies you want to work for, get in touch with them directly. Many keep details on file for consideration when vacancies arise.





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Using Job Boards

Since online job boards have come onto the scene, employers have dramatically reduced their use of print recruitment advertising and have started using internet recruitment advertising more and more.

Tips for getting the most out of online jobs boards

- Make sure recruiters can easily contact you. The email address you give should be one that you check frequently and not one that fills up and causes emails to 'bounce' back to senders. Also, use a professional email address, not something unsuitable like soccerchick@wanadoo.co.uk

- Ensure that the telephone number you provide allows recruiters to contact you in the daytime and evening. And no silly answer phone messages – imagine how it might sound to a potential employer!

- Make sure that your curriculum vitae is up to date. Check that there are no spelling or grammatical errors and ensure that it is easy to read.



- Don't put all your eggs in one basket and rely on just one jobs board. Register your details on several sites – see suggested websites below as a start.
- You could have a 50% chance of finding a job via the internet. Knowing this, it makes sense to spend a suitable amount of time for job searching using internet job sites. Instead of spending 10 hours per week responding to job advertisements, utilise half the time making sure you have a great CV and post it to all pertinent internet job boards.
- Update your CV on job boards regularly. Monster receives thousands of new CV's each week meaning that your CV will start to appear lower in the search results that recruiters see after a few weeks. Therefore, log into each jobs board you have registered on every couple of weeks and change one or two words in your CV so it will appear as if it's updated.

A few websites to visit

www.monster.co.uk

www.jobsgopublic.com

www.totaljobs.com

www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk

www.fish4jobs.co.uk





Preparing your CV

Some employers favour the method of receiving CV's from candidates and some utilise application forms. A good CV will really improve your chances of getting an interview and as a result get you a job more quickly. Putting together a good CV is a good investment to make in both time and effort.

You want to make your CV interesting to others and be the strongest and most representative view of yourself.

The purpose of a CV is to get you an interview.

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------|------------|---------|-------|-----------------------|-------|-----------------|
| Your cover letter | introduces | Your CV | which | Gets you an interview | which | Gets you a job! |
|-------------------|------------|---------|-------|-----------------------|-------|-----------------|



Content

A CV should include the following:

Contact details – first name and surname, postal/email addresses, telephone number

Personal profile – a short 'selling' statement about you

Employment – record employers, dates and job titles

Responsibilities – highlighting skills and strengths

Achievements – showing the results you have achieved

Qualifications – particularly those relevant to the next job

Education – a brief summary (more if you are aged under 25)

Training – show how you have used training, avoid lists

Interests – brief description of up to 3 interests

Age/DOB – not as important as above items, but should be included

Since none of the following have any bearing on your ability to do the job you should exclude them (except when vital to the job):

State of health – irrelevant

Weight and height – irrelevant

Referees – can be given later when requested

Names and ages of family members – irrelevant

Marital status – optional

Salary – better left as late as possible to negotiate

Driving licence – only when the job includes significant driving

Reasons for leaving – can be discussed at interview stage

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Common mistakes

Before you prepare your CV bear in mind some of the most common mistakes. In a survey of CV's the following emerged as some of the most frequent mistakes.

- Not pitched at the target job/ company
- Too long – generally a CV should contain no more than two pages
- Disorganised
- Poorly typed/written
- Over written – long paragraphs and sentences
- Too sparse – only the bare essentials
- Not focused on results
- Irrelevant information
- Misspelling – poor grammar
- No achievements
- Incorrect telephone number
- Gaps in dates



Profile statements

Although a profile statement is optional, it is a great way to encourage a prospective employer to read on. Remember to keep it brief and be prepared to talk about the qualities you mention at interview.

Examples:

'A professional and efficient secretary with several years experience in operations and finance divisions. Excellent communication skills and attention to detail, also acknowledged for discretion, confidence and reliability.'

'A committed manager with proven people skills who is able to motivate staff to achieve high standards of customer service and sales performance. Outstanding sales performance exceeding targets in 3 consecutive years.'



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CV layout

Chronological CV

This is the most common style of CV and is particularly appropriate where it is being used to obtain an interview for a similar job.

- Personal details
- Profile (optional)
- Career/employment history
- Responsibilities and achievements
- Qualifications/memberships
- Training
- Education
- Other information



Functional CV

Especially useful if looking to change career direction or wanting to emphasise achievements and skills rather than employment details.

- Personal details
- Profile (optional)
- Key skills/achievements
- Career/employment history
- Qualifications/memberships
- Training
- Education
- Other information

Self-employed CV

A useful style to use if seeking contract work, or setting up as self-employed. Moves away from being identified with conventional employment and emphasises projects/ assignments successfully achieved.

- Personal details
- Personal profile (background)
- Recent clients (if possible)
- Key assignments undertaken
- Qualifications/memberships



And finally...

- Always have your CV word processed
- Use clean, white, good quality paper
- Have bold headings to attract attention
- Use a large enough envelope to keep your CV flat
- Leave plenty of white space
- Have someone else check it for spelling, punctuation and grammar because it's hard to spot your own mistakes



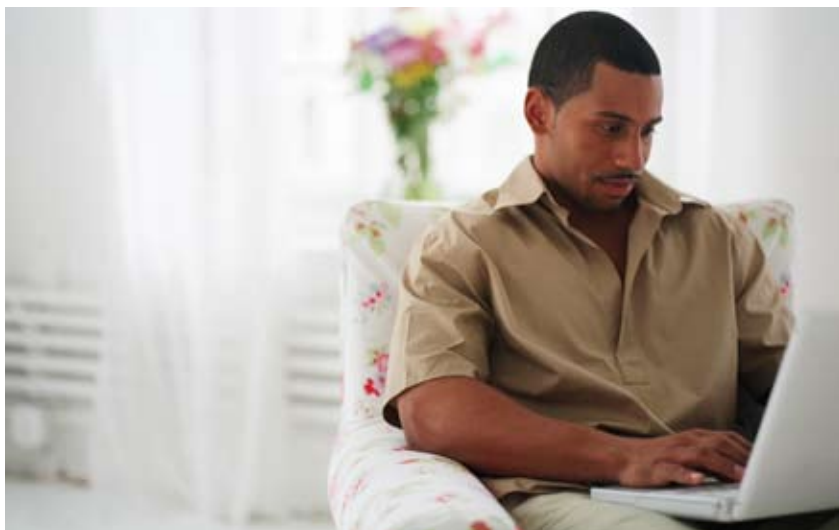
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Chronological CV

Mr Anthony Smith
41 First Road
Town
WS1 1TP

01/01/1970
01922 000000
Anthony.smith@email.com

A motivated Accountant with excellent IT skills who strives to achieve the highest standards in the workplace. An effective communicator with strong leadership skills and the ability to develop and motivate others.



Career/Employment history

Senior Accountant ACSI International 1997 – present

Key Achievements

- Successfully lead a team of 4 Accountants in controlling a budget in excess of £16,000,000
- Manufactured a new process in monitoring spend which was adopted by the wider organisation and is now used on 3 continents
- Reduced spend by up to a third over two financial years without subjecting the company to significant loss

Accountant Barracks Food LTD 1992 – 1997

Key Achievements

- Monitored a budget of around £400,000 which was doubled within 6 months of being in post
- Manufactured a 'proficiency chart' to ensure our targets were being met on time which was later agreed as 'a breakthrough' by directors

Finance Assistant Inter Continental One 1989 – 1992

Key Achievements

- Handled over 14,000 invoices within the first financial year
- Successfully set up a database containing all data required for monitoring purposes
- Consistently handled all customer complaints ensuring their needs were met
- Gained valuable experience in the use of IT as a method of storing data

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Qualifications and Memberships

BA Business and Accounting 2:1 classification
 ACCA
 CIPFA
 NVQ Level 3 Business Administration
 3 A Levels
 6 GCSE's including Mathematics and English

Training

CIPFA – Making sense of performance information
 CIPFA – Essentials of Project Management
 CIPFA – Working with Change
 Equal Opportunities
 Equality and Diversity within the workplace
 Budget Control
 Recruitment and Selection
 Introduction to Shared Services

Education

University of Birmingham 1989-1992
 BA Business and Accounting 2:1
 Classification

St Matthews High School 1987-1989

A Levels

Mathematics A
 English A
 French B

St Matthews High School 1982-1987

GCSEs

English A
 Mathematics A
 Biology B
 Chemistry B
 Physics A
 Woodwork A

Other Information

As well as a passion for Accounting I also enjoy reading books and travelling. I have had the opportunity to travel across Europe on several occasions through ACSI International and believe that I have gained a better understanding of other cultures as a result.





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Functional CV

Mr Anthony Smith
41 First Road
Town
WS1 1TP

01/01/1970
01922 000000
Anthony.smith@email.com

A motivated Accountant with excellent IT skills who strives to achieve the highest standards in the workplace. An effective communicator with strong leadership skills and the ability to develop and motivate others.

Achievements

- Successfully lead a team of 4 Accountants in controlling a budget in excess of £16,000,000
- Manufactured a new process in monitoring spend which was adopted by the wider organisation and is now used on 3 continents
- Reduced spend by up to a third over two financial years without subjecting the company to significant loss
- Manufactured a 'proficiency chart' to ensure our targets were being met on time which was later agreed as 'a breakthrough' by directors
- Made significant improvements to the customer satisfaction model by ensuring customers views were monitored and actioned appropriately
- Embraced change by looking to strengthen finance functions across 4 UK based offices. This was achieved by monitoring workflow and restructuring to meet the demands of the service

Employment History

| | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Senior Accountant | ACSI International | 1997 – present |
| Accountant | Barracks Food LTD | 1992 – 1997 |
| Finance Assistant | InterContinental One | 1989 – 1992 |

Qualifications

BA Business & Accounting 2:1 classification
ACCA
CIPFA
NVQ Level 3 Business Administration
3 A Levels
6 GCSE's including Mathematics and English

Training

CIPFA – Making sense of performance information
CIPFA – Essentials of Project Management
CIPFA – Working with Change
Equal Opportunities
Equality & Diversity within the workplace
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University of Birmingham 1989-1992
BA Business and Accounting 2:1 Classification

St Matthews High School 1987-1989

A Levels

Mathematics A
English A
French B

St Matthews High School 1982-1987

GCSEs

English A
Mathematics A
Biology B
Chemistry B
Physics A
Woodwork A

Other Information

As well as a passion for Accounting I also enjoy reading books and travelling. I have had the opportunity to travel across Europe on several occasions through ACSI International and believe that I have gained a better understanding of other cultures as a result.





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Self-Employed CV

Joseph Smith
142 Chester Avenue
Town
WS1 1TP

01/01/1983
01922 000000
joseph@email.com

Personal Profile

A highly motivated IT consultant with over 5 years experience in providing large organisations with IT solutions. An effective communicator with excellent time management skills who strives to achieve the best possible outcome on any project.

Recent Clients

NTL
Time Warner
MSNBC New York
Southwestern Bell
Telewest Communications

Key Assignments undertaken

NTL

I was sub contracted for a period of 6 months to develop an in house database capable of storing information for approximately 1.5 million customers. Supervising a team of 45 people, I was able to implement a user friendly database which was approved by senior management and adopted by all NTL call centres across the UK.

Time Warner

After spending 12 months working in the USA, I was approached by Time Warner to implement a new network at the London offices. Working in conjunction with a steering group I was able to implement a network with enough capacity to support around 300 staff. With a fully online network, I was also responsible for developing a staff intranet portal.

MSNBC New York

As part of a media communications strategy overhaul, I was appointed as the chief consultant for MSNBC based in New York City. During my time I was responsible for scrutinising the current internal communications strategy, and implementing a new strategy based on improvements suggested by management and staff.

Qualifications/Memberships

NVQ IT Level 3
BA Computing (hons)
ECDL
A Level IT
A Level Computing/Programming
GCSE IT
HNC Computing





Application Forms

Some employers prefer to use application forms rather than invite CV's as applications. With application forms the recruiter is in complete control over the information gained – this makes the screening process more manageable and fair. They can make direct comparisons between your responses and everybody else's.

Before you prepare your application form bear in mind some of the most common mistakes.

- Never simply substitute with your CV – if employers issue application forms it is for the reason stated above.
- Always read the whole form carefully before filling it in.
- Photocopy the blank form. Fill it in first before completing the original form.
- Always ask someone else to check what you have written.
- Jot down your initial thoughts on a rough page – often it can be useful to do this over a few hours, coming back to the page each time you think of something else.
- Allow plenty of time for completion of the form.
- Never leave blanks – always respond in some way, even if it's with a 'not applicable'.
- Honesty is the best policy – if you lie or exaggerate you are certain to be found out and this does your relationship with a prospective employer no good at all.
- Transfer to the original form neatly and carefully using black ink.
- Take a photocopy of the completed form.
- Send the original with a covering letter leaving plenty of time for the form to arrive before the closing date.



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Supporting/other information section

This section of the application form is very important. It is where you make your case for the job. Being invited to interview will largely depend upon the information you write in this section.

Carefully read the advertisement, the job description and the person/employee specification, which describes the necessary skills, abilities, experience and qualifications the employer is looking for.

You will be assessed on whether you have demonstrated the necessary requirements needed to carry out the duties as outlined in the person/employee specification. This may be from your current or previous job or from community or voluntary work or even leisure activities. For instance, you may have considerable domestic responsibilities or may organise social or community activities in your spare time.

Ensure that the information you provide is well organised, relevant and that you have covered everything in the employee specification.



You should try to include statements about every item on the person/employee specification and fully explain how you meet the requirement, giving specific examples of your previous experience, knowledge, skills or competencies etc.

For example; if the employee specification asks for 'experience of working with elderly people' then writing 'I have experience of working with elderly people' is not enough.

You need to explain when, where and what was involved. For example; 'I helped care

for my grandmother for 3 years. She lived in the family home and I helped her to wash and dress each morning. I also helped with personal care including helping her with meals and using the toilet' etc.

You can continue on separate sheets of paper if necessary.

Online/electronic application forms

- Give online forms the same level of attention as paper-based forms.
- Create a text file and use it to write your entries for the form, separating each section with a line break.
- Spell check your answers or get someone else to read them for spelling, grammar and general comments.
- Once you are happy with your answers, go back online and navigate to the online form. Open your text file and copy and paste your answers into the correct sections.
- Check the online form carefully and once you are happy with it, submit it.
- Save your text file – you will be able to re-cycle your answers for other applications.



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There are several things you can do to increase your chances of a successful outcome in your interviews.

Travel

A sure way to increase the pressure on you at an interview is to arrive late and flustered. So it will be up to you to consider:

How long the journey will take

The location of the interview

Parking arrangements

Aim to arrive at least 10 minutes before your appointment time. Have a dry run. Make the journey at a similar time of day and check how long it actually takes. Always have the telephone number of the company with you so you can at least contact them if unavoidable delays occur.



Body language and interview protocols

- Shake hands – make sure your handshake is firm and positive.
- Sit down when invited and where indicated. It would be embarrassing to find yourself seated in the interviewer's chair and have to move!
- Remember that you are already more than half way there.
- Check your posture – don't slouch. Sit well back in the chair.
- Maintain good eye contact – interviewers will notice if you avoid looking at them.
- Use your interviewer's name if you know it. Do not use first names until invited to do so.
- Listen carefully to the information you are given and the questions you are asked.
- Give, clear, full answers without rambling or going off at a tangent.
- Stress your suitability for the post without appearing boastful or arrogant – do not lie or exaggerate.
- Ask the questions you have prepared when invited to do so. If all your questions have been answered and you cannot think of any others, then say so.
- Always thank the interviewer for their time, even if the experience was not a pleasant one. Smile, shake hands and wait to be shown out.



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Dealing with nerves

Try and feel confident – remember you've been shortlisted from dozens (or even hundreds) of applicants. It is natural to be a little nervous, but to help here are a few tips for dealing with nerves before an interview.

- Arrive early enough to go and have a cup of coffee close by
- If you are travelling by car, listen to relaxing music on your journey
- Avoid rushing about and overheating
- Breathe deeply
- A short walk from the train, bus or car park will help you calm down



Handling questions

- Research the company beforehand. If you attend an interview knowing about the company you will come across like a professional who is serious about finding a good match with an employer. Try checking out the company's website or talk to people who work there.
- You may be interviewed by a panel which will normally be made up of 2 or 3 people. In a structured interview the panel will ask candidates a set of questions which have been agreed between panel members beforehand. The questions will have been chosen to allow you to expand upon your application and demonstrate to the panel the extent to which you meet the most important requirements of the job. The questions you will be asked will often be linked to the person/employee specification, so read it again before you attend the interview. In this way you may be able to anticipate the questions you will be asked and think about the best way of answering them. Be ready to expand on your answers, don't just use 'yes' and 'no' answers. You have basically got to sell yourself, your skills and your experience. Give specific examples of what you've done or what you know.
- The panel will use probing questions to help you provide evidence that you have the skills to do the job. This may involve firstly asking a broad question about the subject area and then asking questions that require more specific information. For example:-
- What is your experience of dealing with people over the telephone? (broad)



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- How did you deal with any 'irate' telephone callers? (specific)
- During the interview listen carefully to the questions being asked. If you don't understand then don't be afraid to ask the panel member to repeat the question. Few people get through an interview without making some mistakes, so don't lose heart if this happens to you.
- The panel keeps a record of their assessment of each candidate so that the reasons for their decisions are clear, consistent and objective. Don't be worried by the panel taking notes during the interview.
- Work on gaining a rapport with the interviewer.
- Listen as much as possible. Try to find out what the employer is looking for then tailor your responses accordingly.
- Take the opportunity to ask questions. This is a good opportunity to determine if the position will be a good move for you. Questions could include asking the interviewer what they think of the company or asking what the co-workers are like. These types of questions will help illustrate to the interviewer that you are serious about finding a good match and they will be more likely to see you as an honest, straightforward person they can feel comfortable recruiting.
- If you attend an interview and are unsuccessful, you can ask for feedback on your performance. This can be very useful and may help you with your next interview. Don't lose heart, use each interview as a learning opportunity and keep on trying until you are successful!





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The most common form of assessment is the interview, but increasingly you can expect to come across a combination of different assessment methods alongside, or instead of, the traditional interview.

This guide is intended as an introduction to some different types of assessment methods. It describes what you can expect from the various exercises, and offers advice about how to approach the assessment itself.

Multiple assessment methods provide a more comprehensive overview of an individual's strengths and limitations than any single method. They are standardised, so everyone who takes part in the same exercise has the same opportunity to demonstrate their skills and abilities.



They are more objective than an interview alone and allow you to show the range of your abilities in a variety of different situations. Feedback on your performance helps you understand your own strengths and development needs.

You may be assessed individually, or with a group of other participants, in which case the whole procedure is often called an assessment centre. You may be interviewed or observed by more than one assessor. Exercises can be broadly divided into those which are completed individually and those which involve interaction with assessors or participants. Descriptions of the type of exercises you may encounter follow.

Individual Exercises

In-Trays

Involve working from the contents of a manager's in-tray, which typically consists of letters, memos and background information. You may be asked to deal with paperwork and make decisions, balancing the volume of work against a tight schedule. For example; you are asked to take over the role of the public relations manager of a company that is organising a stand at an exhibition. Your tasks are based around organising the stand, touching on issues such as personnel, finance and marketing.

Aptitude Tests

These are typically timed, multiple choice, paper and pencil tests which assess your abilities to interpret or reason with various types of information. The type of test will vary depending on the nature of the job, but might include tests of verbal or numerical reasoning, or the ability to follow logical instructions or sequences of diagrams. For example; you are given short passages of information, and are asked to evaluate statements in light of the information contained in the passages, deciding whether they are true or untrue, or you cannot say without further information.



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Tests of Productive Thinking

These tests look at the volume, diversity and originality of your ideas. You are presented with open-ended questions relating to various problems and situations, and are asked to generate responses within a time limit. For example; you are given a scenario in which shop floor workers in a factory have expressed low job satisfaction, and staff turnover is high. You are asked to generate as many ideas as you can of ways to increase staff morale within a limited budget.



'Self-Report' Questionnaires – Personality, Motivation and Interests

You may be asked to complete one or more 'self-report' questionnaires. These are not concerned with your abilities, but look at how you see yourself in terms of your personality, motivation or interests. There are no time limits or right or wrong answers, and you should always respond frankly and honestly, not as you think the assessor would want you to, or as you would like to be. For example; Personality questionnaires such as the Occupational Personality Questionnaire (OPQ) ask about your preferred style of behaving at work, in terms of the way you relate to others, the way you approach and solve problems, and your feelings and emotions. Motivation questionnaires look at the energy with which you approach your work, and the different conditions which increase or decrease your motivation. Interest inventories ask you to decide how much you like carrying out various types of activities at work.

Interactive Exercises

Group Exercises

These are timed discussions, where a group of participants work together to tackle a work-related problem. You are observed by assessors, who are not looking for right or wrong answers, but at how you interact with your colleagues in the team. For example you role play a member of the marketing team for a pharmaceutical company. The team is required to discuss the launch of a new consumer product, covering issues such as advertising, ethical concerns, and packaging and pricing.

Interviews

An interview of some sort forms part of most assessments, although the format may vary. In a structured or competency based interview you may be asked about examples of situations when you have demonstrated particular skills, or about how you would approach specific problems. For example; you are asked to give an example, and talk about, an occasion when you have organised the work of a team.



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Presentations

You may be required to make a formal presentation to a number of assessors. In some cases this will mean preparing a presentation in advance on a given topic. In other cases, you may be asked to interpret and analyse given information, and present a case to support a decision. For example; you are asked to make a decision about the proposed relocation of the head office of an electronics equipment manufacturer. You present your recommendations, fully explaining the reasoning, and are then questioned by the assessor about your decision.



Fact-Finding Exercises

In a fact-finding exercise you may be asked to reach a decision starting with only partial knowledge. Your task is to decide what additional information you need to make the decision, and sometimes to question the assessor to obtain this information. For example; you take on the role of a regional manager in a holiday company, dealing with a customer complaint. You are asked to decide what further information you need in order to reach a decision, and have a time limit in which you can question the assessor to obtain this information, before presenting your fully reasoned argument.



Some Useful Hints

Before the assessment

- Know your strengths and limitations in relation to the job. Prepare yourself so that you can describe yourself and your experiences in and out of work and be prepared to draw on examples.
- Stay calm; make sure all the practical arrangements are clear so that you do not arrive feeling flustered or unprepared. If you feel nervous or edgy, try breathing deeply to help calm yourself down.
- If you have a disability and have any special requirements, contact the assessor in advance to discuss the best ways to meet your needs.



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During the assessment

- Listen carefully to the instructions you are given, and ask if you are unsure about what you have to do. Assessors will be looking to see how you perform on the exercises themselves, rather than how well you have understood the instructions.
- Some assessments may be conducted using a computer; make sure you understand how to operate the system and do ask questions before you start if you are unsure.
- Be alert and aware throughout the assessment, and recognise non-verbal signals, such as eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures.
- Don't make assumptions about the way you should respond. If you try to guess what the assessors are looking for, you may be wrong. It is usually best to be yourself, and respond honestly in the way that seems best to you.
- You will be taking part in more than one exercise, so there are plenty of opportunities to show what you can do. If you feel you have done poorly in one exercise, don't give up; your performance on all of them will be taken into account.



- Try not to judge your own performance in relation to the other participants. You will be assessed on your own merits, so you will gain no advantage by attempting to compete with others. Similarly, try not to let other participants intimidate you or make you anxious.

After the assessment

- Multiple assessment exercises are often challenging and you should expect to feel fairly stretched by the end of your assessment. You may find it useful to take a break before you tackle the journey home.
- Take up the opportunity to receive feedback on your performance, whether or not you are successful. This may give you an insight into your strengths and limitations, and may prove useful for future selection procedures.

Further information

If you'd like further information then please contact a recruitment consultant

on 01922 655673

or email jobshopadverts@walsall.gov.uk